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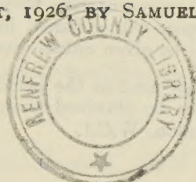
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"THE JOAN DANVERS"

A Play in Three Acts

BY
FRANK STAYTON

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“THE JOAN DANVERS”

CHARACTERS

Produced on Monday, November 8th, 1915, at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, under the management of Miss Horniman.

JAMES DANVERS	<i>Herbert Lomas.</i>
JAMES DANVERS, JUNR. (his Son)	<i>Reginald Fry.</i>
EDWARD ROSS (Master of “The Joan Danvers”)	<i>G. Bentley.</i>
HARTLEY WARREN	<i>Gordon Ash.</i>
MRS. DANVERS	<i>Mrs. A. B. Tapping.</i>
JOAN (her elder Daughter)	<i>Evelyn Hope.</i>
GLADYS (her younger Daughter)	<i>Muriel Pope.</i>
ANNIE (her Parlourmaid)	<i>Marie Royter.</i>

SCENE.—The dining-room of the Danvers’ house, Clifton, Bristol.

TIME.—To-day.

ACT I.—Sunday Morning. 10.30 a.m.

ACT II.—The following Friday. 8.30 a.m.

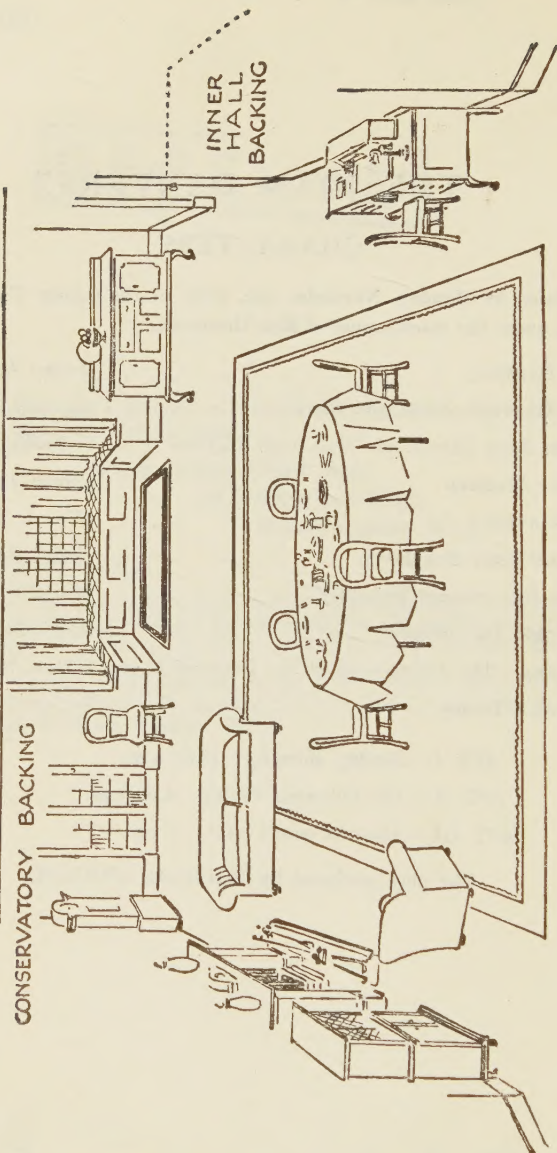
ACT III.—About 3 weeks later. 9 p.m.

The play produced by DOUGLAS GORDON.

GARDEN CLOTH WITH VIEW OF HOUSES

CONSERVATORY BACKING

INNER
HALL
BACKING





“THE JOAN DANVERS”

ACT I

The SCENE is the living-room of the DANVERS' new house at Clifton, Bristol. The furniture suggests wealth without insight.

Down L. a writing-table; on it a telephone instrument. Above the writing-table, the door—leading into the hall. In the centre of the back wall, a large bay window and window-seat, the curtains of which are half drawn. Between the window and the door, a large sideboard. To the right of the window, a door leads into the garden. The windows look out on to a well-kept suburban garden; through the trees, one notices several other houses standing in their own grounds. To the R. there is a large fireplace; just above it, with its back to the garden-door, a comfortable chesterfield couch. In the corner between the garden-door and the fireplace, a grandfather clock. Below the fireplace, a lounge chair. Behind the chair, a bookcase. In the centre of the room, which is expensively carpeted, an oval table. Five chairs surround it. At the moment the table is still covered by a white cloth, underneath which is a blanket-cloth to preserve the polish. Notwithstanding the remains of breakfast on the table, the room has a Sabbath stiffness which is emphasized by the half-drawn curtains.

MRS. DANVERS, a rather faded, middle-aged woman, redolent of the mid-Victorian Era, with a negative personality, well-dressed—appropriately for going to Church, is seated on chesterfield, reading the advertisements in “The Church Times.”

GLADYS, a pretty girl of twenty, in a frock that is smart and well cut, modern, with hair of the rebellious order, discontented without being hard, with a faint suggestion of humour in her mouth, and a touch of moral cowardice in her chin, is seated at centre table, reading a novel—a modern novel, quite a good one.

ANNIE, a pleasant-looking parlourmaid, is clearing the breakfast things. She looks at GLADYS—who has her elbows on the table, carries loaded tray over to the sideboard, and returns to table in order to remove the cloth.

ANNIE (L. of table). If you please, Miss Gladys—

GLADYS (*looks up, removes both elbows, holding book in her hand, continuing to read*). All right!

ANNIE. Thank you, miss! (*She removes cloth and blanket, folds them, then goes to sideboard for tray.*)

MRS. DANVERS. Where is Mr. James, Annie?

ANNIE. I couldn't say, ma'am! (*She goes out L., with tray.*)

MRS. DANVERS. I wish you wouldn't read novels on Sunday morning, Gladys; your father doesn't like it.

GLADYS. There's no more harm in reading a novel than there is in reading the advertisements in a religious paper—as you're doing.

MRS. DANVERS (*quickly turning over pages of her paper*). I was only glancing at them—casually. . . . I think I must send for some of these chickens they advertise so cheaply. Porson is charging me five and six each for quite scraggy birds.

GLADYS. I don't suppose these are any better.

MRS. DANVERS. My dear child! They wouldn't advertise anything but the *best* chickens—in a Church paper. (*GLADYS chuckles.*) Really, Gladys! It seems to me you disbelieve in everything.

GLADYS. I certainly don't believe in advertisements.

MRS. DANVERS. I'm sure I don't know what modern girls are coming to; they scoff at the most sacred things.

GLADYS. People don't publish Church papers from altruistic motives.

MRS. DANVERS. I don't know what altruistic means; we didn't use the word—in my young days. . . . Do put away that book, Gladys! Your father will be in directly.

GLADYS (*marking place in book and putting it on shelf—down R.—with a sigh of boredom*). Oh, my Lord!

MRS. DANVERS. Don't say "Oh, my Lord!" Gladys! It—it isn't quite *nice*! . . . I wonder what your father's doing?

GLADYS. Indulging in his usual Sunday morning exercise, killing greenfly in the conservatory.

MRS. DANVERS. I wonder why he always kills insects on Sunday morning?

GLADYS. If he didn't, he wouldn't have an excuse for smoking. . . . One's natural instincts don't recognize the difference between Sundays and ordinary days! Look at the Beer Line outside the Pubs at a quarter to one! (*She goes up R., to window.*)

MRS. DANVERS. Really, Gladys: what *dreadful* expressions you use! . . . In my young days, we didn't even *mention* our natural instincts.

GLADYS (*yawning*). Even the weather seems to take on a queer kind of respectability on Sundays. (*Goes back to table.*) I wish Father would buy a car and have me taught to drive it.

MRS. DANVERS. Where's Joan?

GLADYS. In her room—dressing for Church. (*Sits L. of table.*)

MRS. DANVERS. Gladys . . . have you noticed anything curious about Joan lately ?

GLADYS. Only that she's growing up.

MRS. DANVERS. Don't be silly ! Joan's twenty-three.

GLADYS. I didn't mean physically, but mentally.

MRS. DANVERS. You don't think she's—she's met some one she—she likes—without telling us ?

GLADYS. If I met some one I liked, I'm bothered if I'd confide in my sympathetic family.

MRS. DANVERS (*shocked*). Gladys !

GLADYS. It'd be a case of " Bid me good-bye and go " if I did ! I've a comprehension of Father's character that wouldn't allow me to take any chances.

MRS. DANVERS. Your father disapproves of young people giving way to their romantic instincts.

GLADYS. Father disapproves of Nature, and would like to tie up our instincts in a piece of office tape. . . . I can't imagine Father making love. . . . How *did* he make love to you, Mother ?

MRS. DANVERS. My father and his were business partners ; they arranged it all, and then advised your father to ask me to marry him.

GLADYS. How horribly sordid !

MRS. DANVERS (*bridling*). Not at all ! A grand passion wasn't considered respectable—when I was a girl.

GLADYS. One gathers that—from the houses they built in those days : *such* respectable houses. When I think what a deadly country England must have been thirty years ago, it makes one a bit less fed up with things as they are.

MRS. DANVERS. I wish you wouldn't say such things on Sundays.

GLADYS. Mother, didn't you ever feel all bottled up with rebellion, as though you'd burst if you didn't let fly ?

MRS. DANVERS. I was taught to accept what was sent to me.

GLADYS. You were taught to look upon God as a kind of mediæval Monarch—vain, touchy, and unreasonable !

MRS. DANVERS (*horrified*). Gladys—

GLADYS. You kept your windows tightly shut—and accused God of sending you consumption ; you didn't look after your drains—and made God responsible for typhoid and diphtheria ; you gave your children milk from filthy dairies—and put it down to the inscrutable decrees of Providence when you lost them.

MRS. DANVERS. Gladys, you are irreverent—almost blasphemous !

GLADYS. Oh, rubbish, Mother ! Nothing's sent to us that we don't bring on ourselves. . . . God isn't as cruel as the Church makes Him out.

MRS. DANVERS (*rises*). I shall go to my room, and pray that you may have more enlightenment !

GLADYS. There's nothing *quite* so irritating as being prayed for when you don't want it.

MRS. DANVERS (*protesting*). Gladys!

GLADYS. Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to hurt your feelings . . . I suppose none of us can help our prejudices . . . I'll go and get ready for Church. (*Rises.*)

MRS. DANVERS. I shall go and talk to your father about you.

GLADYS. Oh, Lord! That means an hour's jaw after dinner, and having my allowance stopped for a week.

MRS. DANVERS. Your father will know how to reason with you better than I do.

GLADYS. Well, if I'm going to have a wiggling, I may as well do something to deserve it . . . I shan't go to Church! (*Sits.*)

MRS. DANVERS. Gladys!

GLADYS. No, I shan't! I shall take a book, and go up on the Downs, and have a lovely time out in the air . . . I don't mind paying for what I do; but I just hate paying in advance.

(JAMES DANVERS enters from the garden; he is dressed for Church—except for a lounge coat which he is wearing in place of his frock-coat. He is obviously intended by Nature to be a Churchwarden and to collect the Offertory. . . . A hard, old-fashioned business man; an autocrat. His apparent piety is never humbug; it is part of himself. He belongs to that noble survival of the Victorian Era—the man of business who would wipe his neighbour's eye during the week, and make up for it by his fervent Sabbath piety. The last thing he suspects is his own hypocrisy.)

DANVERS. I didn't know it was so late. . . . You ought to be getting ready for Church, Gladys!

MRS. DANVERS. Gladys says she is not going to Church. (*Sits R.*)

DANVERS (*goes C.—with heavy irony*). Oh, Gladys says she's not going to Church, does she? And *why* does Gladys say she's not going to Church?

GLADYS. I don't *want* to go, Father!

DANVERS. My dear, there are some things one must do, not because one *wants* to do them, but because it's one's duty.

GLADYS. Why is it my duty to do what I don't want to do—when doing it will only irritate and upset me?

DANVERS (*with irritating but effective ridicule*). Dear! Dear! Dear! Well, we mustn't be irritated and upset, must we? Supposing we go to bed—and send for a doctor who will give us some very nasty medicine—and who will order us to *stay* in bed—for a week?

GLADYS (*angrily*). I'm perfectly well!

DANVERS (*ironically soothing*). No, no, my dear! You *can't* be well—when you talk about Church irritating and upsetting you. . . .

You must be suffering from nerves— from hysteria ! And we must check it—promptly ! Your mother will see that you go to bed, and that you are put on a strict and simple diet—until you are quite normal again !

GLADYS. Father ! I—— (*Struggling, then giving in to the inevitable.*) Oh, all right ! I'll go to Church . . . (*Rises.*)

DANVERS. I don't wish you to go—under compulsion.

GLADYS. I—I—I *want* to go ; I do—really.

DANVERS. Then don't let me hear any more nonsense about being irritated and upset.

GLADYS. No, Father ! (*Looks at her mother appealingly.*)

MRS. DANVERS. I'm sure Gladys quite understands how foolish that kind of talk sounds coming from a girl of her age.

GLADYS. All right, Mother ! You needn't rub it in . . . I'll go and get on my hat. . . . (*She goes out quickly, L.*)

DANVERS (*chuckling*). I don't fancy we shall hear any more of that kind of talk. (*Gets prayer-book from desk.*)

MRS. DANVERS. You have a wonderful method of dealing with young people, James ! (*Picks up "The Church Times," then puts it down quickly.*)

DANVERS. The iron hand, my dear, within the velvet glove.

MRS. DANVERS (*reflectively*). I suppose young people *do* think a little differently from what we do ?

DANVERS. We must educate them. (*Crosses R. and sits.*)

MRS. DANVERS (*shaking her head*). Or let them educate us. (*Sighs.*)

DANVERS. Nonsense ! We must allow our experience of the world to guide them. (*Picks up "The Church Times."*)

MRS. DANVERS. Does that make for progress, James ?

DANVERS (*snorting*). Progress ? Rubbish ! . . . *Our* generation made all the progress that was necessary. This generation should mark time. . . . Where's Joan ?

MRS. DANVERS. I think she's upstairs.

DANVERS. Young Hartley Warren has been talking to me about Joan ; he admires her very much.

MRS. DANVERS (*surprised*). James . . .

DANVERS. He's in a very good position . . . Marine Insurance. . . . It would be an excellent match for Joan !

MRS. DANVERS. I wonder if she likes him ?

DANVERS. He likes her—which is much more to the point ! He has been meeting her a good deal lately—at dances and other entertainments, and I have reason to believe he intends asking her to marry him.

MRS. DANVERS. I wonder what she'll say.

DANVERS. You had better sound her on the subject ; tell her that the match would have my strong approval—in fact, that I have set my heart on it !

MRS. DANVERS. James, I think that parents sometimes lay up great trouble for themselves by setting their hearts on arranging their children's futures—without consulting their children's wishes.

DANVERS (*irritated*). Why is it that you invariably agree with me in the presence of our children, and insist on arguing when we are alone?

MRS. DANVERS. I wasn't arguing, James; I was only—pleading.

DANVERS. Pleading? What for?

MRS. DANVERS. For you to make allowances for them.

DANVERS. You mean you want me to allow them to have their own way in everything?

MRS. DANVERS. Oh, no, James! Not in everything. . . . But they are old enough to think for themselves——

DANVERS (*angrily*). Eh?

MRS. DANVERS (*soothingly*). In *some* things, James; only in *some* things.

DANVERS. I know how to deal with my own children; and I'll trouble you not to sympathize with them behind my back.

MRS. DANVERS (*unconsciously*). I don't, James! I always *defend* you—when you're not there!

DANVERS (*surprised—indignant*). Defend me? Against what?

MRS. DANVERS (L.C.). They—they think you a little hard, a little autocratic, James; and so you are!

DANVERS. A man who doesn't know his own mind doesn't know anything.

MRS. DANVERS. Oh, dear me! It's very difficult being a mother nowadays. . . . If I stand up for them, I annoy you; and if I stand up for you, they think I'm unsympathetic. It seems to me I'm a sort of household whipping-post. . . . It's very disheartening!

DANVERS. Take my advice, old lady! (*Rises.*) Don't interfere! You look after your housekeeping, and leave me to deal with our children. . . . Men are wiser than women; they know more about training children than women do.

MRS. DANVERS. Men seem to think they know more about *everything* than women do; I suppose that's why women can talk until they're black in the face—and men only laugh. (*Sighs.*)

DANVERS (*crossing L.*). Don't *you* get bitten by this modern craze for questioning everything, my dear! It's not in good taste. . . . (*Looks at watch.*) Come along and get ready for Church! It's nearly half-past ten.

(*They go out to the L.—leaving door open. There is a pause, then the telephone bell rings, and continues to ring—insistently. After a moment, JOAN enters quickly from garden, R.C., and going to telephone, takes off receiver. . . . JOAN is a tall, graceful girl of twenty-three, simply but expensively dressed in dark colours, suggest-*

ing that the day is Sunday in that indefinable way only possible to the British middle-classes.)

JOAN (*at telephone*). Hallo! . . . Why, is that you, Ted? (*Looks round.*) Be careful! You know how Father hates the telephone being used on Sundays. . . . Hold the line a minute!

(*She puts down receiver, and going to door, closes it quietly, returning quickly to telephone.*)

Hallo! . . . When did you get in? . . . No; we start for Church at a quarter to eleven. . . . No; I daren't plead a headache or anything. . . . Father gets dreadfully ratty if any of us shirk going to Church; he thinks we're shamming. . . . Where are you telephoning from? . . . Oh, then you can be here in ten minutes. . . . Hurry! . . . At any rate, it will give us a minute together. . . . No; I mustn't go on talking. . . . Father will be coming down and asking who I'm speaking to. . . . Good-bye!

(*She hangs up, and gives a perplexed sigh. Then she crosses to fire-place. After a moment, DANVERS enters, having assumed his frock-coat and churchwarden manner.*)

DANVERS (*frowning*). Who was that telephoning?

JOAN (*casually*). Wrong number.

DANVERS. I dislike being rung up on Sundays; I shall write to the Controller and explain my views on the subject. . . . Have you seen James?

JOAN. No, Father!

DANVERS. He ought to be getting ready for Church; he always rushes in at the last moment, and changes in such a hurry that he perspires disgracefully throughout the service.

JOAN. Jim's only a boy, Father!

DANVERS. He's eighteen.

JOAN. Healthy-minded boys of eighteen can't be expected to enjoy going to Church.

DANVERS. Really, Joan, you say that as though you sympathized with your brother!

JOAN. I do—rather.

DANVERS. I despise slackness in religious matters; I refuse to encourage it in any child of mine. So long as James is under this roof, he must conform to the rules of this house, and go to Church at least three times on Sundays.

JOAN (*with a sigh*). Very well, Father!

DANVERS. One not only has one's duty to oneself to consider, but it lies with us all to set an example to one's neighbours.

JOAN (*with the ghost of a smile*). I'm sure you do your best, Father!

DANVERS. I try ; I only wish that you and James felt about these matters as I do.

JOAN. We belong to a different generation, Father !

(JOAN turns to fire, then later moves between table and garden-door.)

DANVERS. What has that to do with it ?

JOAN. A great deal. Our idea of religion is to try and get through life as decently as possible, and to play the game—not just on Sundays, but every day.

DANVERS. I don't understand you, Joan !

JOAN. You have always thought yourself justified in making hard business bargains all the week, so long as you made up for it by going to Church three times on Sundays.

DANVERS. That is unjust and untrue ; I'm surprised you could say such a thing.

JOAN (to up R.C.). So am I ! But then—our generation is perhaps a little too hard, too given to logic and common sense ; whereas yours had a perfect passion for sentimentality.

DANVERS. You have never spoken to me like this before.

JOAN. I know ; I've been mute—from cowardice, perhaps from an inability to voice my thoughts. But I think I've changed a great deal these last few weeks, Father ; I think I've suddenly become a woman.

DANVERS. You mean—you're beginning to have opinions of your own ?

JOAN (smiling). I've always had opinions of my own ; strong ones, too. . . . What I mean is : I'm beginning to feel an instinctive desire to be Myself—to live my own life. I'm getting to the rebellious age, Father ; and it's making me foolhardy.

DANVERS. You are upsetting me very much indeed.

JOAN. I suppose you are feeling what a schoolmaster must feel when a pupil suddenly stands up and contradicts his dogma. I can't help growing up, Father ; I can't help being a rebel. Each new generation fights a long, unfriendly duel with the last ; until in their turn they find themselves on the defensive with their own children.

DANVERS. While you are under my roof, you must obey me as the head of this household, and you must conform to the rules of this household.

JOAN. I know ; that's only fair. (Crosses to R.C.) But—oh, I wish I had the pluck to break away !

DANVERS. To break away ? How ?

JOAN (back to fireplace). I don't know. . . . I'm so afraid of learning little deceits. You see, when you're really grown up, you can't go on obeying rules that were made for children ; so, to save arguments and rows, you learn to—well, to prevaricate !

DANVERS (grimly). You mean—to lie ?

JOAN. No; you could scarcely dignify such petty prevarications by calling them lies. They're just necessary deceits. They make life a little less difficult, that's all! . . . Don't you ever tell lies in your business, Father? (*Sits, facing him—at back of table.*)

DANVERS. Certainly not! What an extraordinary question! Why should I?

JOAN. Mrs. Burton told me that you once nearly got into serious trouble by bribing some one to paint the plimsoll mark on one of your ships higher than it should have been. I didn't believe her. . . . Was it true, Father?

DANVERS. Certainly not! . . . There was an inquiry; and it came out that the Captain had done it—without any authority—in order to get in a few extra tons of cargo. His certificate was taken away, he was heavily fined, and dismissed from my employ. His wife spread that story—that scandalous story about me—to shield her husband.

JOAN. How horrid of her! . . . What became of him?

DANVERS. He retired from the sea; I believe he has a small farm in Wiltshire.

JOAN. It was a wicked thing to do, wasn't it? He was risking the lives of all on board by overloading the ship?

DANVERS. It was unwise; but, what was worse, it was illegal! (*Rises.*)

JOAN (*after a pause—reflectively*). How did he get enough money to buy a farm?

DANVERS. I presume he saved something out of his salary and bonuses. . . . Dear! Dear! Where is that boy? (*Turns up a little.*)

JOAN. It's only just after half-past ten.

DANVERS. I don't like his loafing about on Sunday mornings. Where does he go to?

JOAN. I think he goes to the Bridge and watches the ships. Maybe it's in his blood. . . .

DANVERS. What is?

JOAN. The Call of the Sea.

DANVERS. Why should it be? I was never at sea. (*Goes over to R.*)

JOAN. There's sailor blood in most of us Bristol folk—if you trace it back far enough.

(*Enter ANNIE.*)

What is it, Annie?

ANNIE. Captain Ross would like to speak to you a minute, sir.

DANVERS. Captain Ross? Then the "Joan Danvers" must have come in early this morning.

JOAN. My ship. . . .

DANVERS. Your ship? What do you mean?

JOAN. You named her for me, didn't you, Father?—when I was quite tiny.

DANVERS. Tell Captain Ross I am just starting for Church; but that I can see him for a moment.

ANNIE. Yes, sir! *(She goes out.)*

DANVERS. It is extremely thoughtless of Ross to call here—at my private house—on Sunday morning—just as I am going to Church.

JOAN. He's been here to dinner several times. *(She rises, goes L., gets prayer-book.)*

DANVERS. I admit that I've treated him with more consideration than I usually treat my employees. But then Ross is a trifle above the ordinary merchant-seaman class.

JOAN. I'm sure he wouldn't wish to annoy you.

(Enter ANNIE, showing in EDWARD ROSS, a well-set-up, bronzed, good-looking young man of thirty, well and carefully dressed, strong, but a little nervous.)

ANNIE. Captain Ross, sir! *(She goes out.)*

ROSS. How do you do, Mr. Danvers?

DANVERS (R.). Good morning, Ross! When did you get in?

ROSS (C.). We berthed at five this morning. . . . How do you do, Miss Danvers?

JOAN (L.). How do you do, Captain Ross? *(They shake hands. JOAN sits, L.)*

DANVERS. What is it you want to see me about?

ROSS. I should like a few minutes' chat, sir.

DANVERS. Won't it keep until to-morrow—at my office?

ROSS. It's rather important.

DANVERS. I can give you just ten minutes. We start for Church at a quarter to eleven.

ROSS. I'm very sorry to disturb you—on Sunday morning—

DANVERS. You know that I make it a rule never to discuss business on Sunday. "Six days shalt thou labour"—Captain Ross!

ROSS. Yes, sir; but that can't very well apply at sea, or we shouldn't get anywhere.

DANVERS. I realize that the exigencies of navigation demand a certain laxity in religious matters.

ROSS *(smiling)*. The wind doesn't cease to blow on Sundays.

DANVERS. It is scarcely a matter for a joke, Captain Ross.

ROSS. I beg your pardon! I wasn't joking.

JOAN. I'll go and get on my hat. *(Rises.)*

DANVERS. See if you can find that boy.

JOAN. Very well! *(Nods significantly to Ross and goes out L.)*

DANVERS. Now, Ross, what is it you want?

ROSS. I want to talk to you about the "Joan Danvers," sir!

DANVERS. What about her?

ROSS. We shall finish unloading by to-morrow afternoon. What do you propose doing with her?

DANVERS. I propose sending her to Gibraltar, and then back to Bordeaux on Friday next.

ROSS. If you send her to sea next Friday, I give you my word, sir, that if we meet with bad weather, she'll go down like a rock.

DANVERS. What do you mean, man?

ROSS. I mean, sir, that she isn't seaworthy; she needs overhauling. She's old, and she leaks. We've had the pumps going for the last five days.

DANVERS. Nonsense, man! She's good for many a trip yet.

(He moves about during this scene. Ross does not move.)

ROSS. She is—if you'll spend some money on her first.

DANVERS. I've spent a great deal of money on her as it is.

ROSS. The Engineer can scarcely get eight knots out of her engines—even when he whips them up. Every time there's a bit of a sea on, some of her plates start. I tell you, Mr. Danvers, she's rotten—falling to pieces; and that if you send her to sea again without being overhauled, you'll as likely as not lose her—and the lives of all on board.

DANVERS. You are grossly exaggerating, Ross! I didn't know you were such a—a nervous man. You've been listening to the grumblings of your crew. Sailors are always discontented; the sea makes them restless.

ROSS *(grimly)*. Pardon me, sir! I never listen to my crew. They don't grumble to *me*. I'm speaking of what I know, of what I've seen for myself.

DANVERS. If she were unseaworthy, we should hear of it from Lloyd's agent here. *(Ross laughs.)* I fail to see the humour of any remark that I have made.

ROSS. Mr. Danvers, I shouldn't worry you like this without cause. But if I took the "Joan Danvers" out on Friday and lost her, without warning you beforehand that she was unseaworthy, I shouldn't be playing fair with you.

DANVERS. Now look here, Ross, I'm not a fool! I haven't made the money that I *have* made by doing foolish things. Do you think for one moment that I would risk the lives of my employees callously, selfishly? Believe me, I'm not that kind of man! We'll have her repainted, and we'll have the plates seen to; so that when you start on Friday morning you'll have nothing to grumble about. . . . And, moreover, Captain Ross, your salary is raised from twenty to twenty-five pounds a month.

ROSS. Thank you, sir! *(After a pause.)* Look here, Mr. Danvers! You're treating *me* generously; but I can't let you deceive yourself. If the "Joan Danvers" were mine, I should scrap her!

DANVERS (*blandly*). But she *isn't* yours, Ross!

ROSS. I know! But I'm a seaman, and you're not. I've travelled a good many thousand miles in her, and I know that she's capable of every vile trick known to the craft. Fill her up with cargo, and let her loose in a sou'-westerly gale in the Bay, and she'll go to pieces, or become derelict; and then you'll have a nice little bill to pay for salvage.

DANVERS. Do you want to hand me in your resignation, Captain?

ROSS. No.

DANVERS. Perhaps you are sufficiently well off to be independent?

ROSS. You know I'm not; and I have particular reasons for not wishing to be out of work just now.

DANVERS. Then why persist in this foolish behaviour?

ROSS. I can't risk the lives of my crew—and the safety of your ship—without giving you proper warning.

DANVERS. Well, you have given me your opinion, Captain; and I shall have much pleasure in examining the matter for myself. Is there anything more you wish to say?

ROSS. Mr. Danvers, I'm not exaggerating.

DANVERS. Are you—showing the white feather?

ROSS (*curtly*). No! You know perfectly well that I'm not.

DANVERS. If I have the boat thoroughly examined by my own expert, and his opinion does not coincide with yours, will you sail on Friday, or shall I have to engage another captain?

ROSS. But if it *does* coincide with mine?

DANVERS. In that case, Captain Ross, I shall sell the "Joan Danvers" for what she will fetch.

ROSS. Will you give me another ship?

DANVERS. I'm afraid not, Captain; I don't appreciate the nursery-governess attitude in my business.

ROSS. I can't afford to lose my berth; you probably know that!

DANVERS. I should be sorry to lose you; and I should be more sorry still to lose my ship. I have no intention of doing so. But if, in the course of time, the Lord sees fit to sink her, I can at least provide for her being covered by an adequate insurance.

ROSS. There's no reason why she should sink if she's properly overhauled.

DANVERS. You sailors seem to think I'm made of money. I run my ships, sir, not from motives of philanthropy, but to make a profit. . . . Now—are we going to hear any more of this molly-coddling?

ROSS. Will you send her into dry-dock and have her examined?

DANVERS. And lose two or three weeks in learning what I know quite well for myself? No; certainly not! The "Joan Danvers"

sails on Friday. Either you sail in her, or I shall find another captain. (*He looks at Ross, then moves up stage—two or three steps.*)

ROSS. Very good, sir. . . . Excuse me, Mr. Danvers, there's one other matter I want to speak to you about.

DANVERS. Won't it keep until after my return from Church? If you'll excuse me, I must get my hat. The bell is just starting.

ROSS (*relieved*). Very well, sir!

DANVERS. Has it anything to do with the "Joan Danvers"?

ROSS (*half smiling*). No, sir! Nothing to do with the ship.

DANVERS. Then we'll speak of it later. . . . I dislike being late for Church. Good morning, Captain Ross! You can go out through the garden; it will save you quite a few yards.

(*He goes out to the L. Ross goes to garden-door, and waves his hand.*

JOAN enters, dressed for Church, R.C. *They embrace.*)

JOAN. Oh, Ted! Suppose anyone saw us? (*A long kiss.*) Don't! You mustn't! It's too dangerous!

ROSS (*fondly*). My wife! (*They are both up R.C.*)

JOAN (*frightened*). Hush! . . . Oh, Ted, I'm terrified! I hate deceiving Father!

ROSS. What were we to do? He'd have refused to let me see you, forbidden me the house! In another six months I shall have saved enough money to make us independent of him—at any rate for a year or two—until I can get another berth.

JOAN. We ought to tell him; but I daren't risk it. Couldn't you *sound* him on the subject?

ROSS. I was going to just now; but he put me off. Said it was time for Church.

JOAN. I must go with him; he'd never forgive me if I didn't.

ROSS. Couldn't you make some excuse? We have so little time together.

JOAN. No; while I'm what he calls "under his roof," I *must* do what he wishes. And not going to Church is an unforgiveable offence.

ROSS. I hate deceiving him, too; but he's a hard man, and difficult to oppose. These iron-jawed business men with a fanatical religious streak in them are the devil and all when they're roused.

JOAN. I don't know when I'm to see you. Father always asks me where I've been, where I'm going, and with whom?

ROSS (*lowering his voice—which quivers a little*). Couldn't you go to bed early to-night, slip out quietly, and join me where I'm staying?

JOAN (*frightened*). Oh, Ted! How *could* I?

ROSS. What other chance shall I have of seeing you? I shall be on board all day; and your father's given to making surprise visits; and he'd never allow you to go out during the evening.

JOAN. I'll think about it. . . . Oh, why do they make us so

mean and horrid? Why won't they realize we're grown up? Ted, I hate tyranny! Don't you? I want to get away from it.

ROSS. You shall—soon! In a little while we'll tell the whole story, and you shall come to me—for always. (*Takes her in his arms.*)

JOAN. Oh, Ted! I lie awake at night—when you're at sea—thinking of you, praying for your safety. . . . And I wonder whether you know it, whether you can feel it.

ROSS. I think I do—in a way.

JOAN. What did you want to see Father about?

ROSS. Only about some—some necessary repairs to the "Joan Danvers."

JOAN. Father's children are as much his property as Father's ships. . . .

DANVERS (*from hall*). Joan!

JOAN. I must go. . . . He's waiting. . . . I'll try and slip out this afternoon. . . . Wait for me—by the Bridge! . . . Good-bye, dear!

ROSS (*embracing her*). Oh, Joan! Joan! I miss you so—I want you so!

JOAN. It'll all come right soon, dear! We must believe that. . . . Good-bye . . .

(*They kiss. She breaks away, and goes out to the L. . . . Ross mutters an exclamation of impatience, goes to window, watches the DANVERS family go down the path, hesitates, then suddenly draws back the curtains—disclosing JIMMY, a good-looking boy of eighteen, stretched on window-seat, L. side, reading a book.*)

ROSS. You young scapegrace! What are you doing here?

(*JIMMY remains on window-seat. Ross is R. of curtains. This scene must be played very naturally.*)

JIMMY. Playing doggo—until they were safely at Church.

ROSS. Why?

JIMMY. I didn't feel like going to Church. And when I heard Joan talking to you on the 'phone, I thought I'd lie low and have a yarn with you.

ROSS. You'll get into a devil of a row. (*Goes R.C.*)

JIMMY. I'm used to getting into rows! Father's dead nuts on what he calls chastening me. . . . I'm a bit fed up with the chastening act.

ROSS. Confound you! Have you been listening? (*Sits on end of chesterfield.*)

JIMMY. Couldn't help it! You and Joan let yourselves go, and I didn't see the use of stopping you.

ROSS. Are you going to give us away?

JIMMY. Depends on the result of our pow-wow!

ROSS. What do you mean?

JIMMY (*rises*). You could be a very useful brother-in-law if you liked.

ROSS. How?

JIMMY. Look here, old chap, I tell you I'm fed up with life in general; and with the gov'nor and his methods in particular! (*Goes over to R.C.*) I'm sick of that beastly office; it's just like being at school—only worse! I'm not built for that kind of life. . . . I want to see something of the world. . . . I say, have you read this book: "The Wrecker"? It's a ripping yarn! (*Going R.C.*)

ROSS. Why don't you tell your father that being in his office doesn't appeal to you?

JIMMY. I have told him.

ROSS. What did he say?

JIMMY. Rats—or words to that effect.

ROSS. What do you want to do?

JIMMY. I want to go to sea.

ROSS. Don't be a fool!

JIMMY. Oh, I know it's supposed to be the thing to run down your own profession! But that doesn't cut any ice with *me*!

ROSS. Have you told your father you want to go to sea? (*Goes R. of table.*)

JIMMY. Yes.

ROSS. Well? What did he say to that?

JIMMY. He made the usual asinine remark about being under his roof. Of course he wouldn't hear of it! You can't go to Church three times on Sundays when you're at sea, and he jolly well knows it!

ROSS. *Why* do you want to go to sea?

JIMMY. Oh, it's something different! England's so damned respectable it makes you sick! (*Sits.*)

ROSS (*sits on upper R. corner of table*). If you want to go to sea because it's a romantic and exciting life, you're making a big mistake. It's a hard life, an unremunerative one! If you're ambitious, there's no future worth speaking of; if you're alone in the world, you're ten thousand times lonelier at sea; if you're married, it means being separated from your wife for more than half of every year. . . . Jimmy, it's a dog's life! Believe me!

JIMMY. Well, I'm ready to do some barking. (*Rises and goes up R.C.*) What sort of future have I got here—in this deadly monotonous hole—this monument of respectability? Sitting in a frowsty office from nine to five every day; a couple of rounds of golf on Saturday afternoons, and an orgy of Church on Sundays. . . . With two weeks at Ilfracombe or Tenby in August. . . . Oh, my Lord! *Quel a la vie!*

ROSS. You'll find the sea every bit as monotonous.

JIMMY. Not on your life! Don't you go to foreign places?

Don't you hear some other language being spoken ? Don't you see different kinds of people ? My hat ! I'd give my soul not to see an Englishman for a month !

ROSS. One voyage would cure you.

JIMMY. Well, give me a chance to try for myself ?

ROSS. What do you mean ?

JIMMY. Let me stow away on the "Joan Danvers" when she sails on Friday ?

ROSS (*rises*). Impossible ! What would your father say ?

JIMMY. That wouldn't matter—so long as he said it after I'd gone.

ROSS (*grimly*). He'd say a bit more—when you came back. (*Sits on end of chesterfield.*)

JIMMY (L.C.). I wouldn't come back—until he'd promised not to. Father thinks no end of me ; wants me to carry on the name, and all that rot. . . . Fancy me with a wife and kidlets ! Not at home, thank you ! Not for *mine*. . . . The mater says I'm the apple of Father's eye ! My Lord ! . . . If that's so, he's a bit too fond of skinning the apple. (*Crosses to Ross.*) No ; I've made up my mind to sail with you, and that's all there is to it !

ROSS. Sorry, old man ; but I can't take you.

JIMMY. You've got to, old son !

ROSS. Your father would never forgive me—if he found out !

JIMMY. You couldn't help my stowing away.

ROSS. Yes, I could—when you've warned me about what you're going to do ! It would be a bit too thick—deceiving him like that.

JIMMY. I say, what price you and Joan ?

ROSS. We couldn't help it ! If I'd asked his permission to marry her, he would have forbidden me the house—

JIMMY. You bet he would ! Father's too beastly fond of referring to the architectural incidentals of this highly respectable residence ! Either you're not to do things under his roof, or else he forbids you to darken his doors. . . . The guv'nor's appallingly Victorian in his similes. (*Up to L.C.*)

ROSS. Wait until next voyage, Jimmy ! Think it over !

JIMMY (*turns*). No, you don't ! I've made up my mind. . . . Look here, Ted ! You help me, and I'll help you. (*Back to Ross.*) I'll contrive opportunities for you to meet Joan. . . . I'll give you the office when he goes out of Town. . . . You help me stow away on Friday, and I'll help you do the spooning act with Joan all the week. . . . It's a fair exchange !

ROSS. And after you get to sea ?

JIMMY. I don't care a damn *what* I do—once I'm away from here ! Anything from cabin-boy to Officer of the Watch is good enough for yours truly ! Is it a bet ?

ROSS. No, Jimmy ! I'm afraid not. It wouldn't be fair on your father.

JIMMY (*gloomily*). What's the use of kicking against the Inevitable—unless you're prepared to change your boots? (*Sits.*)

ROSS. You'll be sensible, Jimmy? (*Rises.*)

JIMMY. Of course I was only rotting when I said I'd give you away if you didn't help me. . . . A man's got to play the game. But if you knew how sick I was of the office——

ROSS. If you've made up your mind to go, keep on hammering away at your father until he consents.

JIMMY. Hang it! Don't *you* start preaching! I get enough of that from the less recent members of my skittish family. . . . Hang your beastly ship! You can keep it. . . . I've got a cousin in Liverpool who's in the shipping business; I'll write to *him*! He'd be delighted to score off the guv'nor. (*Rises.*) Well, I suppose I'd better change my togs and slip into a back pew and play the giddy penitent—or there'll be a tornado at dinner! Good-bye, old chap! Lots of thanks for your good advice—and so forth! And, I say, Ted——

ROSS. Well?

JIMMY. Joan's got the devil's own temper—when she's roused! So look out for squalls!

(*He runs off L. ROSS laughs—almost ironically, sees photograph of JOAN, takes it up, gazes at it, then replaces it; sighs somewhat philosophically, picks up his hat and stick, and goes out into the garden. . . .*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same SCENE. Five days later. Friday morning: 8.30. Gong sounds as CURTAIN rises.

ANNIE is placing a dish of bacon and eggs on the table—which is laid for breakfast. DANVERS enters from garden, gives his hat to ANNIE, takes up newspaper—a Conservative local paper, and sits R. of table, opening newspaper. Exit ANNIE, L. Outside in the hall a gong is sounded; at its final boom, MRS. DANVERS enters from the L., and sitting, L., opposite DANVERS, commences to dispense the coffee.

DANVERS. The children late as usual?

MRS. DANVERS (*with a sigh*). If you had only taken the architect's advice and built an extra bathroom, breakfast would have been a more punctual meal.

DANVERS. The servants should get up earlier.

MRS. DANVERS. Servants dislike early rising as much as we do.

DANVERS. Then dismiss them, and get a new lot!

(*He helps MRS. DANVERS, then himself, to bacon. She hands him his coffee.*)

MRS. DANVERS (*mildly*). Where, James?

DANVERS. There are plenty of servants to be had—if you take the trouble to look for them.

MRS. DANVERS (*smiling*). I suppose you know best, dear!

DANVERS. I am always down on time! Why can't the children follow my example?

MRS. DANVERS. Because you don't allow them to use the bathroom until you have had *your* bath.

DANVERS (*putting down paper*). You have lately acquired the habit of arguing, and I don't like it. I wish you would try to agree with me in *some* things.

MRS. DANVERS. You are so unreasonable, James! But then, all men are!

DANVERS (*attacking his breakfast*). Rubbish! Don't *you* get bitten by this modern craze for asserting yourself! It's unfeminine!

MRS. DANVERS. James, dear, do you know that we've been married for nearly twenty-five years? It will be our silver wedding next month! And I've never had a holiday.

DANVERS. A holiday? I don't understand what you're talking about! You've been away to the seaside every August!

MRS. DANVERS. In rooms—where I've had to order meals just as I do at home! What I mean is that I've never had a holiday from housekeeping. . . . Sometimes I feel I'd give *anything* not to have to think of food for three or four weeks.

DANVERS. Good Heavens! What nonsense!

MRS. DANVERS (*thoughtfully*). I should like to go away, and stay at a really nice hotel—quite by myself—just for a week or two—every now and then.

DANVERS. Are you mad?

MRS. DANVERS. No, dear; only a little tired of tradespeople and servants.

DANVERS (*grimly*). So you're thinking of going out on strike, too? No wonder Joan and Gladys are in open rebellion if you're giving them a lead.

MRS. DANVERS. I think, James, that *they* have been giving *me* a lead! I've stood between them and you so long that I'm beginning to realize the justice of their claims.

DANVERS (*passing his cup for more coffee*). What claims?

MRS. DANVERS (*reflectively*). Their claims to what they call their own individualities.

DANVERS (*pompously*). While they are under my roof—

MRS. DANVERS. Yes, I *know*, dear! But I'm terrified that they may break away any day and refuse to stay—under your roof.

DANVERS. And live on what?

MRS. DANVERS. I think that modern young people would rather starve than remain—prisoners.

DANVERS. They have quite as much freedom as is good for them.

MRS. DANVERS. James! You and I belong to a different generation—a generation that held totally different views! The world has gone ahead amazingly since we were young, and it's no good our shutting our eyes to the fact.

DANVERS. Young people have grown more selfish and inconsiderate—if that's what you mean.

MRS. DANVERS. No; that isn't exactly what I mean . . . I couldn't altogether put a name to what I'm trying to say. . . . But I think there's a good deal to be said for their point of view.

DANVERS (*with heavy irony*). You'd better go into Parliament, and play the fool in public; but don't try it on in *my* house.

MRS. DANVERS. That's not quite fair, James!

DANVERS. I don't understand what you're driving at.

MRS. DANVERS. I think the children should have a little more liberty; I think they should be allowed to come and go without our asking them where they've been and whom they've met; I think we ought to give up questioning them as to whom their letters are

from. . . . They're growing up, James ; and I—I don't want to lose them.

(DANVERS looks at her for a moment in perplexed amazement, then butters a piece of toast.)

DANVERS. Marmalade, please !

(He takes up paper and starts to read ; it is his way of stopping what he considers a futile discussion. MRS. DANVERS hands marmalade, sighs, and endeavours to keep back her tears.)

I wish, my dear, you'd conquer that irritating habit of sniffing. . . . It annoys me.

MRS. DANVERS (meekly). Yes, James. . . . I—I have a slight cold.

DANVERS (after a look at her—with a snort). Huh !

(MRS. DANVERS, after vainly endeavouring to control her emotions, suddenly bursts into tears.)

What the devil——? (He puts down paper, rises, and comes over to her.) What's the matter, old lady ?

MRS. DANVERS. Oh, James . . . I'm so sorry. . . . But I'm—frightened !

DANVERS. What d'you mean ? What are you frightened of ?

MRS. DANVERS. Joan. . . . She's been behaving so queerly this last week. I've asked her once or twice what was the matter, but she only put me off, and asked me not to bother her. She seemed to—to put me at a distance.

DANVERS (putting her shoulder kindly). I'll talk to Joan.

MRS. DANVERS. I don't believe she'll let you ; she's grown so—so much more determined lately.

DANVERS. I reckon I haven't grown any *less* determined. Don't you worry, my dear ! Leave me to tackle her . . . (Going back to chair, laughing grimly.) I'm not exactly frightened of my own daughter.

MRS. DANVERS. I'm not afraid of Joan ; only of what she may do.

DANVERS. Miss Joan knows on which side her bread is buttered. . . . Cheer up, old lady ! Eat your breakfast !

(Enter GLADYS, fastening her dress.)

GLADYS. Sorry I'm late. . . . Good morning, Mother ! Good morning, Father ! (Pecks at their cheeks, then sits down.) I dressed in five minutes. . . . May I have some bacon ? (Sits on MRS. DANVERS' right.)

DANVERS (helping her). It's perfectly ridiculous that you can't get down in time.

(DANVERS is now R. of table, GLADYS C. and MRS. DANVERS L. of table.)

GLADYS. It's no use, Father! I *can't* get up early; I wasn't made for early rising. . . . Besides, what on earth is there to do if one *does* get up early—except yawn your head off, and long for bedtime? (*Yawns.*)

DANVERS. Why don't you relieve your mother of some of the housekeeping? She says she wants a holiday. . . .

GLADYS. I'm no good at housekeeping; and I hate sewing! I'm no good at music, and I can't write or paint. . . . I think I should like to be a typist or a hospital-nurse!

DANVERS. Rubbish!

GLADYS. I can't do *anything* useful. . . . Father, may I go on the stage?

DANVERS. What???

GLADYS. I don't see why I shouldn't! Lots of girls do—girls like *me*, I mean! They say it's lots of fun.

DANVERS. Ring the bell, Gladys!

GLADYS. All right! (*Does so.*) Why mayn't I go on the stage?

MRS. DANVERS (*protesting*). Gladys!

GLADYS (*exasperated*). Well, you might at least *discuss* the subject!

MRS. DANVERS. Your father is annoyed with you for mentioning such a thing.

GLADYS. Well, why doesn't he *say* so then—instead of sitting there like a pompous family portrait?

MRS. DANVERS. Gladys!

GLADYS. I didn't mean to be rude.

(*Enter ANNIE.*)

DANVERS. Go and tell Mr. James and Miss Joan that breakfast has been ready for some time.

ANNIE. Yes, sir! (*She goes out.*)

MRS. DANVERS (*hoping to divert attention from a difficult subject*). Did the "Joan Danvers" sail this morning, James?

DANVERS. I hope so! She was scheduled to sail at five o'clock—with the tide.

GLADYS. What's the matter with Captain Ross? He seemed awfully down in the mouth.

DANVERS. Nothing that I'm aware of. . . . I don't think we'll ask him up to the house again.

MRS. DANVERS. Why not, James? He seems rather nice.

DANVERS. I don't know that he will stay with the Firm; he has become rather dictatorial lately. I have had some trouble with him.

GLADYS. He wanted you to spend some money, didn't he?

(*There is a sudden change of atmosphere: DANVERS suspicious, GLADYS a little frightened, MRS. DANVERS worried.*)

DANVERS (*sharply*). How did *you* know?

GLADYS. Joan told me.

DANVERS. How did *she* know?

GLADYS. I suppose she must have met him somewhere.

DANVERS. Where?

GLADYS (*nervously*). I—I don't know, Father!

MRS. DANVERS. Why *shouldn't* she meet him, James?

DANVERS. She *shouldn't* meet him without my permission.

GLADYS. I *like* Captain Ross.

MRS. DANVERS. I thought he seemed a very inoffensive young man.

GLADYS. I think Joan likes him, too.

DANVERS. Why do you think so?

GLADYS. Oh, I don't know. . . . Why *shouldn't* she like him?

DANVERS. I have other plans for your sister.

GLADYS. Perhaps you have, Father; but I think Joan prefers to make her *own* plans.

DANVERS (*grimly*). Oh, *does* she?

GLADYS (*angrily*). I suppose you mean by that that "while she is under your roof," she must be content to do as she's told?

MRS. DANVERS (*protesting*). Gladys!

DANVERS. That's exactly what I *do* mean! And the same maxim applies both to you and to James.

GLADYS. Oh, you needn't worry about *me*! I'm a moral coward; however much I rebel, I give in—for the sake of peace. But Joan's different! If Joan made up her mind to a thing, she'd *do it*—even if your blessed old roof fell in and crushed her!

(ANNIE enters.)

DANVERS. Did you tell them?

ANNIE. No, sir!

DANVERS. Why not?

ANNIE. Excuse me, sir! They're not there!

DANVERS. Not there? Not in their rooms?

ANNIE. No, sir!

DANVERS. Are you certain?

ANNIE. Well, sir! I knocked and knocked and couldn't get no answer. So I went in. . . . Miss Joan wasn't in her room, neither was Mr. James in his; and—well, sir! neither of their beds had been slept in.

DANVERS. What are you talking about? (*Looks round inquiringly.*) They went to bed last night as usual at ten o'clock? . . . Where can they have gone? (*Looks at MRS. DANVERS.*)

MRS. DANVERS (*whispering*). Oh, James—

DANVERS (*looking at GLADYS*). Have you any idea?

GLADYS (*shaking her head*). It's rum, isn't it?

DANVERS (*to GLADYS*). Go upstairs to their rooms and see if they have left any message or anything!

GLADYS. Yes, Father! (*Gets up quickly and goes out L.*)

DANVERS (*to ANNIE*). Don't speak of this to anyone!

ANNIE (*hesitating*). I told Cook, sir!

DANVERS. Well, don't tell anyone else. . . . What did Cook say?

ANNIE. Cook said she 'oped it wasn't foul play, sir! Cook's that frightened of burglars!

DANVERS. Tell Cook not to be a fool, and to keep her mouth shut!

ANNIE. Yes, sir! . . . Shall I send for the police, sir?

DANVERS (*shortly*). No. . . . Get back to your work!

ANNIE. Yes, sir! (*She goes out.*)

(DANVERS and MRS. DANVERS look at each other—as though each were trying to gather what the other is thinking.)

MRS. DANVERS (*tearfully*). I told you that you were holding too tight a rein over them, and that they are both too old to be treated as children.

DANVERS. Don't be a fool!

MRS. DANVERS (*timidly*). James. . . . What do you think can have happened to them?

DANVERS. What do you?

MRS. DANVERS. I don't know, James.

DANVERS. What do you suspect?

MRS. DANVERS. I don't—(*swallowing*)—I don't suspect anything, James!

DANVERS. How do you account for their beds not having been slept in?

MRS. DANVERS. I—I can't account for it, James. (*Cries.*)

DANVERS. Stop that! (*She makes a movement to rise.*) Stay where you are! (*She subsides, looking at him, frightened.*) I shall be late for the office.

MRS. DANVERS. You're—you're not going to the office until we've—we've had some news of them?

DANVERS (*rising*). Why not? Am I to neglect my duties—because they are neglecting theirs?

MRS. DANVERS. Oh, James! You are hard——

DANVERS. I am not a sentimentalist—if that's what you mean! You can telephone me when they return, and then, after we've heard their explanations, we can decide what we shall do.

MRS. DANVERS (*frightened*). What do you mean, James?

DANVERS. I will have discipline in my house; if rules are broken, there must be some satisfactory explanation—some reasonable excuse!

MRS. DANVERS. But in the meantime, shouldn't we be making some effort to find out where they've gone?

DANVERS. No. . . . If they've gone out, they've gone out of

their own free will! I don't wish to know *where* they've gone; only *why* they've gone.

(Enter GLADYS.)

GLADYS. Joan's taken nothing but a hat and coat, and her bag—the one she always takes when she goes out; but Jimmy has taken two suits of clothes and some underwear, and brushes and combs and things, and a kit-bag! (*Above table, c.*)

DANVERS. So James is the instigator of this outrage? And Joan has been assisting him?

MRS. DANVERS. Where do you think they've gone?

GLADYS. There's a time-table in his room, opened at the trains from Bristol to Liverpool!

DANVERS. Had the boy any money?

GLADYS. He—he borrowed a sovereign from me last night.

DANVERS. Did he say what he wanted it for?

GLADYS. He said he—he wanted to buy me a present.

DANVERS (*grimly*). James has the makings of a great financier. (*Sits.*) Has your sister said anything that led you to believe she—she was meditating any unusual kind of folly?

GLADYS. No, Father!

DANVERS. Have you any reasonable suspicions as to what they have done?

GLADYS (*doggedly*). No, Father!

DANVERS. You're not worrying about what has become of them?

GLADYS (*after a pause*). No, Father!

DANVERS. Thank you! Then you *do* suspect; or, at any rate, you can make a fairly good guess—about what has happened?

GLADYS (*nervously*). N-no, I can't!

DANVERS. That will do, Gladys!

MRS. DANVERS (*plaintively*). Won't you tell *me*, Gladys, what you suspect?

GLADYS. I can't tell you what I don't know.

DANVERS. I didn't think until now that Joan was—sly and underhand.

GLADYS. She *isn't*!

DANVERS. Gladys! (*Angrily.*)

GLADYS. *If* she's done anything sly and underhand, it's your fault; you drove her to it!

DANVERS. Hold your tongue!

GLADYS. It's true! You treated her just as you treat me—as though neither of us had any intelligence—as though we were still kids! And it's ridiculous—at our age! It isn't fair! We can't call our souls our own!

DANVERS. That will do.

GLADYS. It's different with Jimmie; he's only a boy, and I

suppose boys need a good deal of looking after—to keep them out of mischief. . . . But Joan and I are old enough to be allowed some independence; and it's because we're treated like children that we learn to tell all sorts of little lies and indulge in little petty deceits.

DANVERS. You are being grossly impertinent, and I won't allow it!

GLADYS. I'm *not* being impertinent; I'm merely being honest.

MRS. DANVERS. Quarrelling with your father won't bring your brother and sister back.

GLADYS. I'm not quarrelling! Only, when we tell Father the truth, he always makes out that we're losing our tempers—just to excuse his losing *his* temper! It isn't fair!

DANVERS (*ironically*). My dear, this is how the younger generation talks to its parents nowadays! I ask you to pay attention! It's an object lesson in the bringing up of children!

(ANNIE enters.)

What is it? Have they come back?

ANNIE. No, sir! It's Mr. Warren, sir! He would like to see you for a moment.

DANVERS. Ask him to come in!

(ANNIE goes out.)

Not a word of this before Mr. Warren.

(Pause. MRS. DANVERS and GLADYS look at one another—frightened.
DANVERS gets irritated.)

Confound it! Can't either of you produce a faint imitation of a smile?

MRS. DANVERS (*with a sob*). I'll do my best, James! (*Makes an effort.*)

GLADYS. I can't; I don't feel like smiling. (*Sits R. of MRS. DANVERS.*)

(ANNIE enters, showing in HARTLEY WARREN, a rather cocksure, good-looking, provincial young man of thirty-four, slightly too well dressed.)

ANNIE. Mr. Warren. (*She goes out.*)

WARREN. How do you do, Mrs. Danvers? (*Shakes hands.*)
Hallo, Miss Gladys! (*Crosses behind table to L. of DANVERS.*) Excuse my calling at your house so early, Danvers! As you weren't at the office, I thought perhaps you weren't coming; so I just dropped in to see you for a moment. . . . Anything the matter?

DANVERS (*heartily*). Not at all! Not at all! Very glad to see you, my dear fellow! (*With a rather ironic sense of humour—quite unconscious on his part—to prevent his family from giving itself away.*)

You interrupted a little domestic discussion—that's all! Sit down and have a cup of coffee!

WARREN. No, thanks! I *have* breakfasted. . . . Anyone object to a cigarette? (*Sits.*)

(DANVERS is now R. of table, WARREN seated on his left, GLADYS C. on the L. of WARREN and MRS. DANVERS L. of table.)

DANVERS. Not at all! I think I'll join you—for once.

WARREN (*producing case*). Try one of these! I get them from Alexandria, and I don't mind telling *you*, they haven't paid any duty.

(*The two men light up.*)

That's one of the privileges of being in the Marine Insurance business! You meet a lot of captains of steamers who don't mind doing little jobs for you. . . . I get 'em for three bob a hundred; they'd be twelve and six here. . . . Jolly good, aren't they?

DANVERS. Capital! I think I'll ask you to get *me* a few—on the same terms?

WARREN. Right ho! . . . Where's Miss Joan? Not down yet?

DANVERS. No; she was rather tired. She's having her breakfast in bed. Not as a precedent, but just as a treat! (*Laughing.*)

GLADYS (*demurely*). We're taking it in turns! I'm to have *my* breakfast sent up to me to-morrow, Mr. Warren! Isn't that so, Mother?

MRS. DANVERS (*looking nervously at DANVERS*). I—I didn't know, Gladys.

GLADYS. Father prides himself on his impartiality, don't you, Father?

DANVERS. My dear, isn't it time Gladys commenced her domestic duties? (*To WARREN.*) I have always insisted on my daughters being brought up to be good housewives, Warren!

WARREN. Good idea! I can see *my* sisters doing anything about the house. . . . They're generally on the links by ten o'clock. (*To GLADYS.*) Do you like domesticity?

GLADYS (*viciously*). I hate it! (*Rises.*) I loathe making beds—especially other people's; and I think it's absurd to have a drawing room full of useless things that always have to be dusted.

DANVERS. It's good discipline, my dear!

GLADYS. If ever I get married, I shall insist on living at an hotel! (*She goes out, L.*)

MRS. DANVERS (*rises*). You'll excuse me, Mr. Warren? I have my housekeeping to attend to. . . . That dreadful back-door bell starts ringing so early. . . . (*She goes out.*)

(WARREN rises, opens door for her, closes it, returns towards table, watching DANVERS keenly.)

DANVERS. I am an old-fashioned man, my dear Warren ; and I like to see my daughters performing simple household duties. They are free to amuse themselves—rationally—in the afternoons ; but in the mornings they must work.

WARREN. Capital idea—if you can get 'em to do it.

DANVERS. What did you want to see me about ?

WARREN. I wanted a little quiet chat with you. . . . You've been increasing your insurance on the "Joan Danvers" ?

DANVERS. Yes !

WARREN. Any particular reason ?

DANVERS. I'm expecting to get rather more valuable cargoes.

WARREN. Thought she was going out with bridge-building materials—iron girders, and such like—for that new railroad in Portugal ?

DANVERS. Exactly ! They have to be delivered by a specified date ! If anything happened to the ship, I should have to pay a heavy penalty.

WARREN. You're getting generous in your old age. (*Working across to fireplace.*)

DANVERS. I suppose, as one gets older, one becomes more cautious.

WARREN. Yes ; and as a ship gets older, she wants a bit more insurance. Is that it ?

DANVERS. The risks of the sea——

WARREN. M'yes. . . . Some of the crew on the "Joan Danvers" have been talking a bit this week. (*Taking up photograph on mantelpiece and looking at it.*)

DANVERS. Talking ? How ?

WARREN. I've stood 'em a few gallons of beer, and—well ! they got a bit communicative.

DANVERS. Sailormen are chronic grumblers, and always will be.

WARREN. Rather. . . . They've got some fool idea into their heads that the "Joan Danvers" isn't seaworthy. (*Turns—looking at DANVERS.*)

DANVERS. Ridiculous ! My own expert has been over her, and his report was most satisfactory.

WARREN. When was that ?

DANVERS. Last Monday.

WARREN. Was it anything to do with his report that made you raise the insurance on Tuesday ? (*Looks at DANVERS—amused.*)

DANVERS. No ; I had been intending to raise it for some time. She was absurdly under-insured. If anything had happened to her, I should have been a heavy loser.

WARREN (*crosses to back of table, c.*). Some of those sailors had got it into their heads that the skipper had almost refused to take her out again.

DANVERS. Nonsense !

WARREN. That's what I said. . . . Ungrateful lot of swine—sailormen ! Eh, Danvers ? (*Sitting on DANVERS' L.—looking straight at him.*)

DANVERS. You're right !

WARREN. Does your conscience ever keep you awake at night ?

DANVERS (*looking at him—grimly*). My conscience ?

WARREN. It's a dashed risky game—sort of thing that used to happen in your gov'nor's time ; I never thought *you'd* start playing it, Danvers !

DANVERS. Would you be so good as to explain what you're talking about ?

WARREN (*coolly*). I'm talking about your over-insuring the "Joan Danvers," and sending her to sea in rotten condition.

DANVERS (*rising—with dignified wrath*). Good morning, Mr. Warren !

WARREN. Oh, well ! If that's the game you propose to play—(*Rises.*) It's a pity . . . I thought maybe we might do a deal ?

DANVERS. It's scarcely a tactful way of making a business proposition, to start by hinting unpleasant innuendoes—

WARREN. Oh, bless you ! I wasn't *hinting* . . . I know. (*Sits again.*)

DANVERS (*blustering*). You know *what*, sir ?

WARREN. I tumbled to your scheme. . . . And I tell you I'm ready to do a deal. . . . But don't get ratty !

DANVERS. Will you kindly explain yourself ?

WARREN. If your game comes off, you'll make enough from the insurance to buy a new boat—at *our* expense.

DANVERS (*coolly*). May I trouble you for another of those excellent cigarettes ? (*Sits.*)

(WARREN *hands case*. DANVERS *calmly lights one.*)

Thank you !

WARREN (*admiringly*). My word, Danvers, you *have* got a nerve. . . . But, my dear chap ! . . . Iron girders—in a sou'west gale—in a crazy old craft like the "Joan Danvers." . . . It'd be like that picture in "Punch"—when the bottom fell out of the cab, and the old Johnny had to keep on running. . . .

DANVERS. Do you seriously insinuate, my dear Warren, that I am over-insuring the "Joan Danvers" in the hope that she may founder at sea ?

WARREN. That is the delicate hint I was trying to convey.

DANVERS (*laughing*). And what is the deal you are proposing to make with me ?

WARREN. I'll tell you—when you've admitted the truth of my statement.

DANVERS. And if, of instead admitting such a preposterous statement, I ring the bell and have you shown out?

WARREN. Why, then, my dear Danvers, I shall submit to my Directors the suspicions I have formed concerning you—together with the statements made to me by the members of the crew—including the Mate and the Engineer! And I shall advise them against accepting the higher rate. . . . That wouldn't exactly suit your book, would it? It's the kind of scandal that sticks to a man, and puts a black mark on his reputation! You wouldn't find it easy to insure with another company. . . . An official inquiry would complicate matters. . . . It wouldn't look well for such a prominent citizen—a Churchwarden—a future Member of Parliament—who expects to be made a Baronet for his services to Commerce and his good works on behalf of local Charities. . . . Would it?

DANVERS (*grimly*). Go on!

WARREN. Then you're *not* ringing the bell—to have me shown out? I always knew you were a man of sound common sense. . . . Look here, Danvers, I asked your daughter, Miss Joan, to marry me—last Tuesday night—at the Primrose League dance; and she refused me.

DANVERS. This is the first I've heard of it.

WARREN. She didn't tell you?

DANVERS. No.

WARREN. Well, I don't take a refusal lying down! I've made up my mind to marry her, and I've a way of getting what I want. . . . I want you to consent to my marriage with your daughter; I want you to—to persuade her—to reconsider her decision.

DANVERS. My daughter must make her own choice of a husband—subject, of course, to my consent.

WARREN. That's all bunkum, Danvers! You know perfectly well that your daughters do as they're told.

DANVERS (*grimly*). I admit they've been well brought up.

WARREN. If you tell Miss Joan it's your wish that she should marry me, it's ten to one she'll do it!

DANVERS. I'm not so sure.

WARREN. Will you tell her that?

DANVERS. I have no objection. . . . Yes!

WARREN. I'll keep my word! If she marries me, I'll hold my tongue.

DANVERS. Mind you, Warren, I'm not giving my consent under pressure——

WARREN. Oh, *that's* all right! I don't care a hang *how* you give it, so long as you *give* it. . . . Can I see her? (*Rises, goes to bell, r., and rings it.*)

DANVERS. I thought I told you she was in bed.

WARREN. Ask her to come down! (*Rings bell.*)

DANVERS. What are you doing ?

WARREN. I want to send up a message.

DANVERS. Confound it, Warren ! You're taking an unpardonable liberty——

WARREN. Oh, rats, man ! Don't lose your temper !

(Enter ANNIE.)

Where's Miss Joan ?

ANNIE *(nervously)*. M-miss Joan, sir ?

DANVERS. Has she gone out yet ?

ANNIE *(after a look at him)*. Y-yes, sir !

DANVERS. Thank you ! That will do !

(ANNIE goes out.)

She's gone out !

WARREN. I might stroll along and meet her. I wonder which way she went ?

DANVERS. I don't know.

WARREN. Well, I'll get down to the office, and—call round again presently. . . . Good-bye for the present, Danvers—unless you're coming my way ?

DANVERS. I'm not going to the office just yet.

WARREN. Taking a holiday ? Or are you letting Jimmy represent you ?

DANVERS. I shall be down later on.

WARREN. Oh, all right ! Don't get shirty, Danvers ! I'll play the game with you, if you play it with me. . . . So long !

(He goes out. A moment later, the front door bangs. DANVERS sits at table, grimly pondering the situation. After a moment, MRS. DANVERS and GLADYS enter—anxious and perturbed.)

MRS. DANVERS. We heard Mr. Warren go. . . . What did he want ? *(Goes R.C.)*

DANVERS. He wanted to see me about some business. . . . Any news ?

MRS. DANVERS. Not a word. . . . Oh, James, I'm so anxious !

GLADYS *(down L.)*. What will people say ? How are we to keep the servants from talking ?

MRS. DANVERS. What *can* have happened ?

DANVERS. Say nothing ! Let everything go on as usual !

MRS. DANVERS. Oh, James ! I *can't*. . . .

GLADYS. It's—it's unfeeling of Joan—to go and create a scandal like this—and not to tell me beforehand what she intended to do——

(Suddenly the front door closes. . . . An electric pause. . . . JOAN enters, almost defiantly, prepared for a row ; yet with a certain quiet dignity that impresses itself on those present.)

(*With a cry*). Joan !

(JOAN stands in doorway and looks at them for a moment ; she closes the door. They look at her silently—MRS. DANVERS waiting for her husband to speak, GLADYS a little afraid, DANVERS waiting for JOAN to speak. JOAN smiles faintly, realizing what is passing through their minds ; then, after a moment, she speaks.)

JOAN (*quietly*). Well, Father ?

DANVERS (*rises*). We—your mother and I—are waiting for an explanation.

JOAN. Oh, I know there's going to be a row ; there always is a row in this family—if anyone does anything unusual.

DANVERS (*his back to fireplace*). Staying out all night might be referred to by an even stronger adjective than "unusual." . . . Where is your comrade in this—this extraordinary escapade ?

JOAN (*looking up*). My—comrade ?

DANVERS (*grimly*). Your comrade—your companion——

JOAN. What do you mean, Father ?

GLADYS. Father means : "Where's Jimmy ?"—only I suppose it sounds too commonplace. (*Sits at writing-table.*)

DANVERS. I am quite capable of expressing my meaning, Gladys ! Kindly hold your tongue !

JOAN. I don't understand. . . . Isn't Jimmy at the office ?

MRS. DANVERS (*tearfully*). He's been out all night, too.

JOAN (*surprised*). Jimmy's been out all night ?

(*Positions :—DANVERS at fireplace, MRS. DANVERS, R.C., behind table, JOAN up L. of table, GLADYS down L.*)

DANVERS. Do you mean to say he hasn't been with you ?

JOAN. No. . . .

DANVERS. You haven't seen him ?

JOAN. Not since I said good night to him at ten o'clock last night.

MRS. DANVERS (*bursting into tears*). Oh, I can't bear it ! (*Sinks into chair, at back of table, R.C.*)

JOAN. I don't understand——

DANVERS. Neither of your beds have been slept in.

MRS. DANVERS. We thought you'd gone off somewhere together.

JOAN. How curious !

DANVERS. I shall question James—at the proper time—when he returns. . . . In the meantime, if you have any explanation to offer of your extraordinary conduct, I shall be happy to listen to it ?

JOAN (*in a low voice*). Thank you, Father ! (*Sits at back of table, c.*)

MRS. DANVERS (*anxiously*). Have you had any breakfast, Joan ?

JOAN (*wearily*). No, Mother !

MRS. DANVERS (*rising*). I'll get you some——

DANVERS. One moment, please! Let us first hear what explanation she has to offer us!

(MRS. DANVERS *re-seats herself*.)

JOAN. I stayed the night with some friends.

DANVERS. Where?

JOAN. In Bristol.

DANVERS. Who were they?

JOAN. You wouldn't know them!

DANVERS. I intend to know them—before the day is out.

MRS. DANVERS. My dear, if I were you, I'd answer your father frankly. His curiosity is reasonable—under the circumstances. (*Watching JOAN.*)

JOAN. Yes; I know it is, Mother! That's what makes it so difficult!

DANVERS. We are waiting.

JOAN. Father, I don't suppose you ever had a—a sudden impulse in your life; so you'd scarcely understand what prompted me to—to act as I did last night.

DANVERS. Let us come to the point!

JOAN. I couldn't go to sleep; I was restless—troubled——

DANVERS. You didn't attempt to go to sleep; you didn't even undress!

JOAN (*after a moment*). No . . . I knew I shouldn't sleep. I sat at my window for a long time—thinking. (*Defiantly.*) I haven't done anything I shouldn't have done. . . . Why do you all look at me as though I were a criminal?

MRS. DANVERS (*soothingly*). My dear——

JOAN. Why should we always be expected to crush our natural impulses in this exasperatingly conventional country? Why can't we do unusual things—without having to explain them afterwards—in cold blood—to people who don't—who can't understand?

DANVERS. I am still awaiting your explanation.

JOAN. I've been cooped up, stifled, caged—all my life! This house is like a prison—with its endless list of rules and regulations—that treat us like children!

GLADYS. It's no use kicking, Joan; they'd never understand.

JOAN. They brought us into the world; but they don't own us—body and soul!

DANVERS. While you are under my roof——

JOAN. While I'm under your roof, I've got to be an echo of your prejudices and narrow-mindedness. I know. . . . And I've got to tell you who I've seen, and what I said to them, and what they said to me, and why and where and when. . . . And it nearly drives me crazy!

DANVERS. Where did you spend the night?

JOAN. I've told you.

DANVERS. You didn't tell me the truth!

JOAN. No; I didn't think you'd believe me if I did! So I told you the first lie that came into my head!

DANVERS. Then you didn't spend the night with friends?

JOAN. If you want to know where I've really been, I'll tell you. . . . (*Defiantly.*) I've been down to the Docks to see the "Joan Danvers" start.

(*All look at each other. . . . A long pause.*)

You don't believe me? I knew you wouldn't! But it's true!

DANVERS (*grimly*). The "Joan Danvers" was scheduled to sail at five o'clock. (*Comes nearer table.*)

JOAN. She *did* sail at five; I sailed in her. They put me off with the pilot at Portishead. I came back by train. . . . I couldn't resist the temptation. . . . It was glorious!

DANVERS. Captain Ross had no business to allow you to do such a thing! I shall reprimand him very severely—on his return! I don't know that this escapade of yours won't lead to my dismissing him altogether.

JOAN. It wasn't his fault! I begged him to let me go. . . . He couldn't very well refuse; you see, *he* thinks I'm a grown-up person.

DANVERS. When did you arrange this plan?

JOAN. A day or two ago.

DANVERS. Have you been meeting Captain Ross?

JOAN. Once or twice.

DANVERS. Without my knowledge?

JOAN. Yes!

DANVERS. Why?

JOAN. I wanted to meet him; I knew you'd forbid it.

DANVERS. You are quite right! I *should* have forbidden it. I wish you to end your acquaintance with Captain Ross—to see nothing of him in future.

JOAN. I'm old enough to choose my own friends.

DANVERS. You will not choose them from amongst my employees. (*Goes back to fireplace.*)

MRS. DANVERS (*quietly*). What time did you leave the house, Joan?

JOAN (*after a look*). About four.

MRS. DANVERS. Why didn't you go to bed?

JOAN. I was afraid of over-sleeping myself.

DANVERS. What did Captain Ross say when you first suggested the idea?

JOAN. He asked what *you* would say?

DANVERS. What did you tell him?

JOAN. I said I would make it all right with you.

DANVERS. Why did you say that?

JOAN. Because I'd made up my mind to go; and I knew how conscientious he was.

DANVERS. So you are entirely to blame?

JOAN. Entirely!

MRS. DANVERS. How did you leave the house?

JOAN. I left the garden ladder outside my window last night.

DANVERS. You crept out of your father's house—like a thief!
(*Sits at head of table.*)

JOAN (*with a shrug*). If you like that kind of exaggerated simile, Father!

DANVERS. It doesn't help your case to be rude, Joan! You did a very foolish and risky thing; you risked an extremely unpleasant scandal being started about you. . . . I must ask you to give me your word that you won't repeat such a dangerous escapade in future!

JOAN (*in a low voice*). You have my word! I shan't do it again!

MRS. DANVERS. Do let me get you some breakfast, Joan?

JOAN. I really don't want any, thank you, Mother!

GLADYS. Oh, Joan! Wasn't it frightfully thrilling?

JOAN (*half-smiling*). It was—rather!

GLADYS. Wasn't it awfully dark and mysterious—threading your way through the dock gates and out into the river?

JOAN. Very.

GLADYS. Did you get wet—coming ashore with the pilot?

JOAN. No. . . . Don't go on questioning me, honey! I'm—tired!

DANVERS. Go upstairs and finish your domestic duties, Gladys!
(*Rises.*)

GLADYS. Yes, but—— Father! I want to——

MRS. DANVERS. Do as your father tells you, dear!

GLADYS. Oh, bother! I want to hear all about Joan's voyage down the river. . . . I hate being sent out of the room when there's anything exciting going on. (*She goes out.*)

DANVERS. How many times have you met Captain Ross since the "Joan Danvers" came into port?

JOAN (*recovering from a day-dream*). I couldn't say—how many times.

DANVERS. More than once—or twice?

JOAN. Yes.

DANVERS. Why?

JOAN. I wanted to meet him.

DANVERS. Did he want to meet you?

JOAN. I suppose so.

DANVERS. You arranged to meet?

JOAN. Naturally.

DANVERS. Every day?

JOAN (*after a moment*). Yes.

DANVERS. More than once a day?

JOAN. Sometimes.

DANVERS. Is the ladder still against your window ?

JOAN. I don't know, Father !

MRS. DANVERS. It wasn't—when I went into her room after breakfast.

DANVERS. Who removed it ?

JOAN. Perhaps the gardener——

DANVERS. He doesn't come on Fridays.

MRS. DANVERS. Jimmy——

DANVERS. Who suggested your using the ladder ?

JOAN. No one, Father !

DANVERS. Did Jimmy suggest it ?

JOAN. He—he told me he'd let himself in and out that way once or twice—when he wanted to go to a music-hall !

DANVERS (*grimly*). This is how my children deceive me ! (*Crosses L.C.*)

JOAN. What can they do—when you treat them as prisoners ?

DANVERS. Why did you leave the ladder against your window ?

JOAN. In case I changed my mind, and wanted to come back.

DANVERS. Have you used it before ?

JOAN (*after a pause—in a burst of exasperation*). If you ask me any more questions, I shall shriek !

MRS. DANVERS. Joan, dear ! Try and control yourself !

JOAN (*her nerves on edge*). It's like being in the witness-box !

DANVERS. Let us change the subject for the moment. . . . Joan, Mr. Hartley Warren was here this morning.

JOAN. Why ?

DANVERS. He tells me he proposed to you a few days ago, and that you refused him ?

JOAN. Yes !

DANVERS. Why ?

JOAN. I don't like him.

DANVERS. I do.

JOAN. That's different, Father !

DANVERS. I wish you to reconsider his proposal.

JOAN. It wouldn't be any use, Father !

DANVERS. I tell you it is my wish that you *should*.

JOAN. I'm sorry, Father ; but I can't.

MRS. DANVERS. Joan, dear ! Don't be quite so obstinate ! Your father asks you to reconsider it. Surely you can do that—to oblige him ? After all, children owe their parents some little consideration.

JOAN. Why should I encourage Mr. Warren to expect an answer that I can never give him ?

MRS. DANVERS. How do you *know* you will never want to say yes ?

JOAN. I *do* know it, Mother !

DANVERS. Mr. Warren has laid me under some slight obligation to him—an obligation I wish to return.

JOAN. Father! You don't expect me to pay your debts—with my whole life?

DANVERS. I expect you to show some consideration for my wishes.

JOAN. Father! Don't think me hard and horrid; but I don't like Mr. Warren. I dislike him intensely; and I won't marry him. . . . I love some one else.

MRS. DANVERS (*sympathetically*). My dear——

DANVERS (*coldly*). May I ask if you are referring to Captain Ross?

JOAN. Yes, Father!

DANVERS. Thank you. . . . Has he asked you to marry him?

JOAN (*with a half-smile*). Of course he has.

DANVERS. And you have said you would—subject to my consent?

JOAN (*quietly*). I said "yes," Father!

DANVERS. You thought my consent was unnecessary?

JOAN (*in a low voice*). I knew you'd never give it.

DANVERS. But—all the same—you made up your mind you'd marry him?

JOAN. Yes. . . . You see, Father, I love him.

MRS. DANVERS (*pleadingly*). Joan. . . . (*To DANVERS.*) James, they—*they* love each other!

DANVERS. I consider that you have behaved in an altogether underhand and deceitful manner; I am more than astonished, I am deeply pained and disgusted. You will *not* marry Captain Ross! And moreover you will write to him at once, breaking off the engagement!

JOAN. I can't do that, Father!

DANVERS. Then I will do it for you.

JOAN. It wouldn't be any use. He'd understand—that you were doing something that you had no right to do.

DANVERS. Are you in a position to teach me my duty?

MRS. DANVERS. James, dear! Can't we make some allowance for them? They are both young——

DANVERS. I can make no allowances for such deceit! I will not tolerate an engagement between Joan and this young man.

JOAN. Father——

DANVERS. Captain Ross's connection with the Danvers Line of Steamships will cease after this present voyage; and I will make it my business to see that he doesn't get another ship in a hurry.

JOAN. That's tyranny, Father! It's unpardonable tyranny!

DANVERS. I am not going to discuss the matter any further.

MRS. DANVERS. Oh, my dear! Why didn't you tell *me*?

JOAN. I couldn't, Mother! You'd have been bound to tell Father; and then the cat would have been out of the bag for good.

(*Enter ANNIE.*)

ANNIE. Mr. Warren, sir!

(*Enter WARREN. ANNIE goes out.*)

WARREN. Hallo, Miss Danvers! Been for a walk? (*Up L.C.*)

JOAN. Yes.

WARREN. Thought I might meet you; but you must have gone the other way.

DANVERS (*crosses to door, L.*). Excuse me a moment, Warren; I have some business to attend to. . . . Joan, will you entertain Mr. Warren for a moment? (*To MRS. DANVERS.*) My dear—

MRS. DANVERS. Yes, James?

DANVERS (*frowning*). I wish to speak to you—

MRS. DANVERS (*with a sigh*). Very well, James! (*Rises.*)

DANVERS. I shan't be five minutes, Warren.

(*Mr. and Mrs. DANVERS go out, L.*)

JOAN (*amused*). One's parents have such a passion for the obvious!

WARREN. Did your father tell you why I called?

JOAN. Yes. . . . That's why I said that Father was so dreadfully obvious.

WARREN. Well?

JOAN. I told him *why* I had said that I couldn't marry you.

WARREN. What did you tell him?

JOAN. That I didn't—like you—in that way.

WARREN. Was that all?

JOAN. What do you mean, Mr. Warren?

WARREN. Did you tell him that there was—some one else?

JOAN. Aren't you being a little impertinent?

WARREN. Did you tell him that you'd been meeting that fellow Ross almost every day this week?

JOAN. You *are* being impertinent, Mr. Warren. (*Rises.*)

WARREN. You didn't suspect that anyone had seen you, did you?

JOAN. I'm sorry I can't marry you, Mr. Warren. (*Crosses R.*)

WARREN. On Wednesday night, I was coming home very late—from a Bridge party; I happened to pass this house. . . . There was a ladder against your window. . . . I waited. . . . I saw you come quietly through the garden, mount the ladder, and then let it down with a piece of rope or something. . . . It was nearly five o'clock. . . . Shall I tell your father?

JOAN. I hope you enjoyed—playing the spy? (*Sits on L. end of couch.*)

WARREN (*comes to corner of table*). The funny thing was—it didn't interfere with my intention to marry you. . . . I must be pretty badly hit to want to marry you—under the circumstances.

(*He gets just the subtlest under-lining of the word "marry." Not in the least blatant.*)

JOAN (*after a pause*). Well?

WARREN. Well? Am I to tell your father?

JOAN. What good would that do ?

WARREN. Promise to marry me, and I won't tell him ; and I'll endeavour to forget the episode. Some men rather like a spice of the devil in the women they marry ; it's more amusing than monotonous placidity.

JOAN. Will you give me a cigarette, Mr. Warren ?

WARREN (*handing case*). Of course ! What for ?

JOAN (*taking one and lighting it*). To soothe my nerves.

WARREN. My cigarettes seem popular this morning. (*Lights one.*) By Jove ! You look stunning, sitting there smoking ! You look like an Empress. . . . By Jove ! if you knew how I admired you—

JOAN. Please let me think—

WARREN. You and I could make things hum ! It wouldn't be a cosy nook ; but it'd be a fairly exciting whirlpool ! That's what I like—excitement ! You don't see *me* marrying an apostle of domesticity. . . . I like a woman who looks well in a taxi, at a restaurant, at the theatre ; a woman who can be gay—who makes other men look at her—unconsciously, and who makes the other women prize her clothes and hate her. . . . That's what *you* could do, my dear ; and I'm ready to forget what we'll call a youthful indiscretion.

(JOAN *puts out her cigarette, rises, facing him, smiling.*)

JOAN. I can't marry you, Mr. Warren ; I don't *want* to marry you. I *won't* marry you. . . . Thank you for the cigarette ! I feel better. (*Going to door.*) You can please yourself about telling my father. . . .

(DANVERS *comes in L.*)

Good morning, Mr. Warren ! (*She goes out.*)

DANVERS. Well ?

WARREN (*R.C.—laughing*). Damn her ! She's a little spitfire !

DANVERS. She says no ? (*Up L.C.*)

WARREN. At the moment. (*Crosses to DANVERS.*) Look here, Danvers, you've jolly well got to put on the screw, and make her change her mind !

DANVERS. You can safely leave the matter in my hands. (*Crosses R.*)

WARREN. I think I'd better—for the present. . . . Good-bye ! I must be off. . . .

(*He goes out, L. . . . DANVERS thinks for a moment, his face rather expressive of his thoughts ; then he rings the bell. . . . After a moment, ANNIE enters.*)

DANVERS. Tell Miss Joan I wish to see her. (*Crosses to fireplace.*)

ANNIE. Very good, sir !

DANVERS. Has Mr. James returned yet ?

ANNIE. No, sir !

DANVERS. That will do. . . . Tell Miss Joan I'm waiting.

(ANNIE goes out. . . . DANVERS sits R. of table, thinking, and muttering to himself. . . . After a moment or two, JOAN enters—wearily.)

JOAN (L.C.). What is it, Father ? I'm tired.

DANVERS. You've refused him again—definitely ?

JOAN. Yes, Father !

DANVERS. In spite of everything I said ?

JOAN. Yes, Father !

DANVERS. I am disappointed in you, Joan !

JOAN. I'm sorry.

DANVERS. You are obstinately determined to thwart me in this matter ?

JOAN. I've told you *why* I can't marry Mr. Warren.

DANVERS. You are puzzling me very much by your attitude, Joan !

JOAN. I'm sorry, Father ! Perhaps you don't understand *me* any more than I can understand *you*.

DANVERS. You say that as though you were proud of belonging to the younger generation ?

JOAN. So I am ; so were you—in your day ! So will our—our children be in *theirs* ! You have brought us up in a very hard, a very strict school ! We have had to crush and stifle all our natural human instincts ! It isn't right, Father ! A boy can break away ; it doesn't matter so much for him. But a woman belongs to herself for such a little while. . . .

DANVERS. I brought you up in the school in which I myself was brought up ; not on the flabby, sentimental modern method ! I've done my duty to you—as a Godfearing man—as a conscientious father !

JOAN. We each think the ideas of our own generation to be the right ones ; and perhaps I'm as pig-headed as *you* are—on that point. . . . But when it comes to the question of marriage, Father, it's different ! It's not a thing that can be argued about ! You can choose my education—and my friends ; but you can't choose my husband !

DANVERS. Hartley Warren is a man *any* girl might be glad to marry.

JOAN. I'm sorry, Father ; I can't marry him. (*Crosses to fire-place.*)

DANVERS. He is young, well off, good looking ! He is desperately devoted to you ! He could make you happy.

JOAN. How could he make me happy—when I love some one else ?

DANVERS. Nonsense! You'll forget all about that little affair in a few months.

JOAN. That's where you're wrong, Father!

DANVERS. You might as well be in love with the Man in the Moon as with Ross; you'd have just as much chance of marrying him!

JOAN (*wearily*). Father, why go on discussing it?

DANVERS. Because I intend that you *shall* marry Warren! (*Rises.*)

JOAN. And I tell you I *won't*!

DANVERS. You are an ungrateful, undutiful child——

JOAN. I'm a woman—who knows her own mind——

DANVERS. Obstinate, deceitful, sly——

JOAN. If I am, you made me so!

DANVERS. You have no respect for me, nor for my wishes! You're upsetting your mother, and setting a bad example to your sister!

JOAN. You've no right to speak to me like this—as though I were a child—as though I were unfit to be in your house! Whatever I've done, you're responsible; you with your petty tyrannies and everlasting rules, rules, rules! You've ruled nearly all the poetry and happiness out of my life! But you shan't do it! You can't! I'm Me—Myself—a woman! I'll fight for my happiness, tooth and nail, with every breath I draw—with every—with every——

(*She clutches on to mantelpiece, then stumbles to couch, sits—almost fainting.*)

DANVERS (*alarmed*). There! There! There! You've excited yourself so much, you're quite exhausted. (*Rings bell.*)

JOAN (*gasping*). I'll be all right—in a minute. . . . Just—let me alone, Father!

DANVERS. What's the matter with you? You're as white as a sheet!

JOAN (*panting*). I'm—all right——

(ANNIE enters.)

DANVERS. Tell your mistress to come here at once!

ANNIE. Yes, sir! (*She goes out.*)

DANVERS. Will you have a glass of water? (*She shakes her head.*) You haven't had any sleep! You're overtired! And you've been unduly exciting yourself!

(MRS. DANVERS enters.)

MRS. DANVERS. What's the matter, James? (*Goes to couch.*)

DANVERS (*crosses to L.C.*). Joan's come over a little faint! It'll soon pass off!

MRS. DANVERS. It's so bad to lose your temper! I knew what would happen! I'll get you a cup of tea, my dear——

JOAN (*rises—with a sob—beseechingly*). Mother!

(*A tremendously tense moment. . . . MRS. DANVERS looks up at her, then stares—her lip trembling; then, with a cry, she snatches JOAN into her arms.*)

MRS. DANVERS (*C.—frightened*). Oh, my daughter! My little daughter! What has happened? What have you done?

JOAN (*R.C.—sobbing*). Oh, Mother!

DANVERS (*L.C.—fussing*). What's it all about? What is it?

MRS. DANVERS. Oh, my dear! My dear! (*Pulls her on to couch—angrily*). Oh, don't fuss so, James! Leave her alone with me!

JOAN. No, Mother! He's got to be told; he'd better be told now—at once. . . . Father! I told you a lie just now. . . . I've told you several lies. . . . Your—your system of bringing us up has forced me to tell you lies.

DANVERS (*grimly*). Go on!

JOAN. I didn't go to Portishead. I saw the "Joan Danvers" start, then I sat about, watching the shipping, until eight o'clock. And then—then I went to see a doctor——

DANVERS (*puzzled*). A doctor?

JOAN. Yes; he didn't know me! I—I didn't give him *your* name. . . . He—he told me I was going to—to have a child—early in the spring.

MRS. DANVERS (*soothingly*). Oh, my dear!

DANVERS (*choking*). What does this mean?

MRS. DANVERS. Don't worry her with questions, James! I'm sure it's all right.

DANVERS (*thickly*). All right? All right? My daughter calmly tells me she's—she's going to——

MRS. DANVERS. James!

DANVERS. What's the meaning of it? Has she suddenly gone mad? Or—or is it something—something worse?

JOAN (*piteously*). Father! Don't you understand?

DANVERS (*almost choking*). Who's the man? Is it Ross? By the Lord, he shall pay for it! My daughter—*my* daughter—to be like this——

(*All his pride, his vanity, his egotism, hit on the raw.*)

I can't believe it; I can't realize—— (*Bitterly*). Is it Ross?

JOAN. Yes, Father! Of course!

DANVERS. The villain! The scoundrel! The cur!

JOAN. Father! . . . He is my husband! (*Goes towards DANVERS.*)

DANVERS (*choking*). Your—husband?

JOAN. We were married two months ago—secretly—when I was staying with my cousins in Liverpool.

DANVERS. You married him—this fellow—secretly—without my consent?

JOAN. Yes, Father! I didn't dare risk telling you.

DANVERS (*almost beside himself with rage.*). You—you—

(*Almost about to strike her.*)

MRS. DANVERS. James! Control yourself! For shame!

DANVERS. Shame? Yes—shame! My daughter's shame—mine! All my ambitions—my pride—shamed!

JOAN. I love him—

DANVERS (*thickly*). Love him? You—you—(*choking*) you—you married him, did you? You are going to present him with a child, are you? (*Almost with an insane laugh.*)

MRS. DANVERS. You've no right to talk like this, James, with Joan as she is!

DANVERS (*wildly*). No right? No right? When she's ruined me, shamed me. . . . Let me tell you this! Your child will never see its father! You will never again be his wife! You'll only be—his widow!

JOAN (*hoarsely*). What do you mean, Father?

DANVERS. I mean that your husband has gone to sea in a ship that is rotten to the keel, that she'll founder in the first storm!

JOAN (*wildly*). Father. . . . You don't know what you're saying!

DANVERS. I knew she was rotten! So did Ross! He wanted me to have her overhauled—or send her to be broken up! I told him that if she didn't sail this morning, he would never have another ship of mine. . . . He said that he needed the money—for *you*, I suppose? So he sailed!

JOAN. He needed the money for *me*—and for our child!

DANVERS. He won't get it, neither will *you*—nor your child! I shall get it; I'm well insured! But *you*—you and your child—when it comes—can go to the workhouse—and *starve*! You've ruined me, shamed me, defied me! I won't have you in my house!

JOAN (*white-faced, dazed*). You—you sent him to sea—in a ship you knew was doomed? You sent him—my husband—the father of my unborn child—the man I love—to his death—in order to make more money for yourself? You—murderer!

MRS. DANVERS (*pleadingly*). Joan! Joan!

JOAN (*hysterically*). You—murderer! You—my own father—you— Oh, it's impossible! Unbelievable! It's too horrible! (*Sits R. of table.*)

DANVERS. It's a just punishment for you—a just vengeance—

JOAN. Just? Where is the justice of such devilish cruelty? You've sent the man I love—my husband—to his death—for your own profit!

DANVERS (*gloating with a kind of fiendish relish*). The ship will go down, I tell you; she'll spring a leak; they'll man the pumps, and work at them—all day—all night; her engines will break down; she'll fill—foot by foot—sinking lower and lower every hour; and then they'll get the boats out—not the new boats your husband entreated me to buy—but the old leaky worn-out boats, painted to deceive the Inspector. . . . And your husband—the man you married secretly—without my permission—will sink with them—and drown—do you hear me?—drown! Leaving you and your child to live on Charity! (*Laughs thickly*.)

MRS. DANVERS (*terrified*). James! You're not yourself! You're mad!

JOAN (*in a hard voice*). No, Mother! He's showing us what he really is—a murderer, a murderer!

DANVERS. The disobedient child shall be punished! There's justice in the scheme of things—justice—justice——

(*A loud double knock at the front-door.*)

(*Dazed.*) What's that?

JOAN (*mechanically*). A telegram!

(GLADYS *rushes in with telegram*. DANVERS *about to take it*. JOAN *snatches it and tears it open.*)

It's for me, I know; sent by the pilot from Portishead!

(*She reads the telegram—perturbed.*)

No. . . . Mother, it's from Jimmy!

DANVERS. Where is he? What has become of him? Give it to me!

JOAN (*reading*). "Off to sea on the 'Joan Danvers.' Stowed away. Having fine time. Love to all. Jimmy."

DANVERS (*hoarsely*). My son—my son—on the "Joan Danvers." . . .

JOAN (*bitterly*). Yes; your son! On the "Joan Danvers." . . . As you say, there is justice in the scheme of things. . . . When you sent my husband to his death, you didn't realize you were sending your son, too? You'll have two murders on your soul—*now*—two murders—two——

(*With a terrible cry she rushes from the room.*)

DANVERS (*choking*). My son—my son——

(*He staggers and gives an inarticulate cry.*)

MRS. DANVERS (*looking at him—with horror*). You sent—our son——

DANVERS (*thickly*). Justice—justice in the scheme of things—
justice——

(*He pulls at his collar to loosen it, staggers, falls. MRS. DANVERS
and GLADYS rush to him.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III

The same SCENE. Three weeks later. It is about nine o'clock in the evening.

JOAN is sitting R. of table, sewing; her face looks worn with anxiety. She seems continually to be listening for something—waiting.

In first part of Act, JOAN'S voice is almost terrifyingly passionless; she is quiet, self-contained, assured, never melodramatic.

GLADYS enters from L., with an evening paper.

JOAN (looking up). Is there anything in the paper?

GLADYS. No; nothing but a lot of silly football news.

(JOAN looks at her for a moment, then goes on with her work.)

Joan, dear, you haven't given up hope? (Goes back of JOAN to fireplace and warms her hands.)

JOAN (in a queer voice). Hope . . .

GLADYS. Don't speak like that, Joan; you—terrify me!

JOAN. I can neither hope nor despair; I think my feelings are in a kind of coma. I'm . . . dazed.

GLADYS. How's Father?

JOAN (in a hard voice). I don't know; I haven't asked.

GLADYS. Poor old Mother! It's pretty hard lines on her. . . . She's worrying herself crazy about Jimmy; yet she has to conceal it—for Father's sake. . . . Do you think Father will—— (She hesitates.)

JOAN. He said there was justice in the scheme of things. If that's true, he will get better; he will live—and he will remember.

GLADYS (awed). How bitter you are, Joan!

JOAN. I have reason to be bitter.

GLADYS. Yes, I know. . . . Joan, how long would it have taken the "Joan Danvers" to get to Gibraltar—in the ordinary way?

JOAN. About eight days.

GLADYS (in a low voice). She's nearly a fortnight overdue; and yet—you haven't given up—all hope?

JOAN. I am waiting——

GLADYS. For what?

JOAN. For some sign—some awakening of my instinct—to tell me what has happened.

GLADYS. What do you mean, Joan?

JOAN. When you love anyone very dearly—when you are absolutely one with each other—however far apart you may be, you generally keep up a kind of wireless communication—you know by instinct if all is well; I think it's a kind of spiritual communion. . . . I have had no feeling, no instinct—that the connection is broken. Until I have that feeling, I shall not believe—the worst.

GLADYS (*in a whisper*). If—the worst—*did* happen?

JOAN. I should still have to go on living. There mustn't be *two* murderers in our family.

GLADYS (*shuddering*). Oh, don't, Joan dear! . . . (*Puzzled.*) I don't quite understand—

JOAN (*quietly*). I must think of my child—*his* child—

GLADYS (*a little awed*). How queer that sounds! . . . Joan, has Mr. Warren called again?

JOAN. Yes.

GLADYS. Did you see him?

JOAN. No. . . . Gladys, I can't help thinking that Mr. Warren—guesses.

GLADYS. Guesses what?

JOAN. About Father—and the "Joan Danvers."

GLADYS (*startled*). Joan. . . . Does that mean—a scandal?

JOAN. I think it depends—on *me*.

GLADYS. Why?

JOAN. Mr. Warren wants me to marry him.

GLADYS. What has that to do with it?

JOAN. If I say I'll marry him, he will—give up suspecting (*bitterly*) Father's lapse from virtue; if I refuse— (*Shrugs.*)

GLADYS. But you're married—

JOAN. Mr. Warren doesn't know that.

GLADYS. Do you mean—he'll expose Father, prosecute him—ruin him?

JOAN. Unless Father refuses to claim for the insurance.

GLADYS. He *couldn't* claim it—after what has happened.

JOAN. The only thing business men are not sentimental about is—business.

GLADYS. But—but if—if the worst happened, could you—could you bring yourself to—to marry Mr. Warren—to save us all from ruin—to save Father from—prison?

JOAN (*quietly*). If the worst happened, and by moving a finger I could save Father from paying for what he has done, I wouldn't move that finger—not even for *your* sake, Honey!

GLADYS (*in a whisper*). How you hate him, Joan!

JOAN. Do you love him for making me a widow—for taking our brother from us?

GLADYS (*staring in front of her*). It seems such an awful thing—to hate your own father!

JOAN. He has robbed me of my just inheritance—a husband's love and care—happiness—light—life—— (*Almost losing her poise—her voice quivering.*)

GLADYS. He's very ill, Joan; he hasn't spoken since that terrible morning——

JOAN (*ironically*). Sentimentality again! How I hate it!

GLADYS (*in a low voice*). I can't hate Father—when he's lying there—not moving—only staring as though in terror——

JOAN (*bitterly*). Let him give me back my husband, and I will try to forgive him.

(GLADYS takes up photograph from mantelpiece.)

GLADYS. Poor old Jimmy . . . I miss him so . . . (*with a choke*) I can't believe——

(*She puts down photograph, goes over to JOAN, and buries her face in JOAN'S lap.*)

JOAN (*gently*). There! There, Honey! You mustn't give way. . . . There's still hope.

(MRS. DANVERS enters.)

MRS. DANVERS. Joan. . . . Your father is asking for you.

(GLADYS rises and sits in chair below fireplace.)

JOAN. Yes, Mother?

MRS. DANVERS. It is the first word he has spoken since he was taken ill.

JOAN. Yes, Mother.

MRS. DANVERS (*timidly*). Won't you—come to him?

JOAN (*in a low voice*). I can't, Mother.

MRS. DANVERS (*pleadingly*). Joan—— (*By L. corner of table.*)

JOAN. It's no use, Mother! I couldn't speak to him—gently! I'd rather not speak to him at all.

MRS. DANVERS. Couldn't you—pretend—just for once? (*Piteously.*)

JOAN. No, Mother! I know I seem hard to you; but I feel hard—I feel unforgiving—I feel bitter. I couldn't go in there, and play the hypocrite. . . . Please don't ask me!

MRS. DANVERS (*quietly*). Very well, Joan! (*Goes over to couch and sits.*)

JOAN. Oh, I hate disappointing and hurting you, Mother! I think you're wonderful. . . . How you can bear to be in the room with him when—— (*Shudders.*)

MRS. DANVERS (*quietly*). I must think of the living. My son—wouldn't wish me to do otherwise.

JOAN (*between her teeth*). I can only think of—my husband.

GLADYS. Shall I go to Father? (*Rises.*)

MRS. DANVERS. If you will, dear! Tell him I shall be back in a minute.

GLADYS. Yes, Mother. (*She goes out.*)

(JOAN puts down her work and goes and sits by her mother.)

JOAN. Are you very tired, dear?

MRS. DANVERS. A little. . . . Joan! I think your father is going to get quite well again. . . . He's a very strong man. . . . What are we going to do?

JOAN. How do you mean, Mother?

MRS. DANVERS. About you. . . . Can you bear to go on living here—meeting your father every day—

JOAN. You will have to bear it, Mother!

MRS. DANVERS. I have had to go on meeting him, being with him every day, for twenty-five years. . . . To-day is our silver-wedding anniversary.

JOAN (*shocked*). Mother . . . (*Desperately.*) What can I wish you?

MRS. DANVERS (*in a whisper*). Forgetfulness. . . . I have been a loyal and a dutiful wife to him—for twenty-five years. He has never once asked me—if I was happy. He took *everything*—as a matter of course—as a right. . . . Once I nearly ran away; but I couldn't leave you—my children. . . . Jimmy—(*choking*)—Jimmy was only a baby. . . . Your father said he didn't want any more children because they'd be sure to be girls; and he didn't want any more girls. . . . I was very unhappy. . . . I could see you all growing up, and going away from me; and I could picture growing old—alone—with only your father to make growing old beautiful. . . . You see, Joan, I didn't marry for love. . . . It's only love that can glorify—even growing old. . . . I'm fond of him! You can't help being fond of anyone with whom you have lived for a quarter of a century. . . . My dear! It is better to marry for love—even as *you* married—even if your happiness is cut short as yours has been—than to marry and live through the long monotonous years—in comfort—without worry—without *love*—as I did!

JOAN (*after a pause*). Mother . . . I wish I hadn't been quite so impatient with you; I wish I'd been—a little more responsive.

MRS. DANVERS. A mother aches to be one with her children; but when she realizes that they think it a kind of loving tyranny, she tries not to be too curious. . . . But if you only knew how much a mother appreciates being told things—

(JOAN looks at her—perplexed; hating the sentimentality, afraid of hurting her. She pauses for a moment.)

JOAN. I think there's only one kind of *really* happy marriage, and it needs two things: a sense of humour, and to love each other so much that when your children grow up and marry, it's like going back to the days of your honeymoon—when you both were just utterly happy at being together, and didn't want anyone else near you. . . . That's how *we* had planned our life together!

(Enter GLADYS, leaving door open.)

GLADYS. Mother! Father's insisting on getting up.

MRS. DANVERS. Gladys! (*Rises and goes L.C.*)

GLADYS. He says there's something on his mind, that he can't rest—

MRS. DANVERS. I must go to him. He's much too weak to move.

(*She goes out.*)

GLADYS (*goes R.C.*). He asked me why *you* wouldn't go to him; I didn't know what to say.

JOAN. Why didn't you tell him the truth?

GLADYS. I couldn't. (*Goes to fireplace.*) He asked me if there'd been any news of the ship. . . . His brain seems quite clear, but he speaks very slowly, as though every word cost him a tremendous effort.

JOAN (*shuddering*). I don't want to see him. . . . What can I do, Gladys?

GLADYS. I don't know.

JOAN. It's rather terrible being without money of one's own; it makes one so—so helpless, so dependent. . . . If it wasn't for this, I could go out and work, and earn my living. . . . But I can't—yet.

(*Enter ANNIE.*)

ANNIE. Mr. Warren has called, miss—ma'am; and he would like to see you for a minute.

JOAN (*after a pause*). Ask him to come in!

ANNIE. Yes, ma'am! (*She goes out.*)

GLADYS. Why do you see him?

JOAN. I want to find out what he's going to do.

GLADYS. Shall I go?

JOAN. No; I'd rather you stayed.

(ANNIE enters, showing in WARREN.)

ANNIE. Mr. Warren! (*She goes out.*)

WARREN (L.C.). How do you do? I came to ask after your father?

JOAN. He's a little better this evening.

(GLADYS stands by JOAN.)

WARREN. Could I see him, do you think ?

JOAN. I don't think he's well enough to see anyone.

WARREN. It's very important.

JOAN. Is it about the "Joan Danvers" ?

WARREN (*surprised*). Yes. . . . Has he—told you anything ?

JOAN. I—guessed a good deal.

WARREN (*perturbed*). You *did* ?

JOAN. Mr. Warren ! Has there been any word of the "Joan Danvers" ?

WARREN. Not to my knowledge.

JOAN. I thought the insurance people telegraphed to all the signal-stations and the various ports ?

WARREN. Of course. . . . But you see, to-day being Saturday, all the offices are closed. . . . Is it on account of your father that you're so anxious ?

JOAN. It's because of my brother——

WARREN. Jimmy ? What about him ?

JOAN. He sailed in the "Joan Danvers," unknown to my father !

WARREN. My Lord !

JOAN. We are naturally anxious on his account ; the suspense is terrible ! And it's worse for me because—of my husband.

WARREN (*astonished*). Your—husband ?

JOAN. I am married to Captain Ross ; I have been married for some months.

WARREN (*after a long look at her*). Good Lord ! . . . Why didn't you tell me ? (*He walks about.*) This is—this is rather surprising news—to *me* ! Your father never told me——

JOAN. He didn't know.

WARREN. I see. . . . Well, I think I must be getting back——

JOAN. Won't you wait—just for a few minutes ?

WARREN. Why ?

JOAN. Mr. Warren, do you think there is any chance—any possibility of the "Joan Danvers" being saved ?

WARREN. The rates at Lloyd's yesterday were nearly a hundred per cent.

JOAN. And to-day ?

WARREN. Couldn't say ! It's Saturday. . . . I've been playing golf.

JOAN. Does that mean——

WARREN. It means that there will be a pretty severe inquiry into certain rumours. . . .

JOAN. And if I had promised to marry you, Mr. Warren, could you have made that inquiry just a formal affair ?

WARREN. I could have helped your father considerably.

JOAN. Won't you help him now ?

WARREN (*goes to c., back of table—smiling*). Are you asking me to compound a felony ?

JOAN. I want to find out your point of view.

WARREN. Do you think he deserves to be helped?

JOAN. Do you wish your proposition to him to be made public?

WARREN (*startled*). He told you?

JOAN (*rises*). No; I guessed. . . . And I wanted you to admit it—before my sister. I have no sympathy for my father, Mr. Warren; but I don't mean to allow my mother to be given more sorrow to bear than she has already.

(DANVERS *enters—on Mrs. DANVERS' arm; he is in a dressing-gown. His face is set; he looks rather feeble. He speaks slowly—with difficulty. All through this Act, DANVERS is suffering from the effect of a slight stroke. He never raises his voice, never increases the pace of his speech. He scarcely moves, but his eyes follow JOAN—beseechingly.*)

MRS. DANVERS. He insisted on coming down; nothing would stop him. I don't know *what* the doctor will say. . . . How do you do, Mr. Warren? I didn't know you were here.

WARREN. I came to inquire after Mr. Danvers.

(DANVERS *nods to him. Mrs. DANVERS assists her husband into a chair L. of table. He looks at JOAN.*)

DANVERS. Sit down. . . . Is there—any news—of my ship?

WARREN. No. (*Sits at back of table, R.C.*)

DANVERS. No news. . . . (*To WARREN.*) Why did you want to see me?

WARREN. I wanted to know—what you were going to do?

DANVERS. What are *you*—going to do?

WARREN. It depends.

DANVERS. If the ship is lost, I stand the loss—out of my own pocket. I claim no insurance . . . (*Looking at JOAN.*) Do you—understand—what I'm saying?

JOAN. Yes, Father!

DANVERS. Well?

JOAN. Well, Father?

DANVERS. Isn't that—just?

JOAN. How is it just?

DANVERS. I pay—

JOAN. So do I, Father! So does Mother! So do we all! So do the wives and children of the crew. . . . You only pay in money; we pay—in blood and tears.

DANVERS (*bewildered*). I thought you'd be—glad; that it might help to make you—a little less—bitter.

JOAN. Would a million pounds—would all the money in the world give me back my husband and my brother?

DANVERS (*mechanically*). My son—our name—

WARREN. I can't help saying that you're behaving like a sports-

man, Danvers! Of course I know it's because the show's been given away, but even as things are, you stood a big chance of winning your case. And I repeat—it's a dashed sporting decision, and I respect you for it!

DANVERS (*with grim humour, after a long look at him*). Thank you, Warren!

MRS. DANVERS. I think, dear, you mustn't talk any more just now.

WARREN (*rises*). I must be getting home. . . . Good-bye, Danvers! Buck up! Good-bye, Mrs. Danvers. . . . I'm terribly sorry about all this. . . . Good-bye, Miss Danvers! Good-bye, Mrs. Ross. . . . I can find my way out. . . . (*He goes out.*)

GLADYS (*wonderingly*). How queer that sounds—Mrs. Ross!

DANVERS. Joan! (*Looks at her.*)

JOAN (*coldly*). Yes, Father?

DANVERS. There is justice—in the scheme of things. . . . Look at me!

JOAN (*quietly*). Yes, Father!

DANVERS. There's a clock ticking somewhere—tick tack, tick tack—right through my head!

MRS. DANVERS (*soothingly*). I'll stop it, James.

(*She goes to grandfather clock in corner and stops it. DANVERS smiles ironically at her literal interpretation of his words.*)

DANVERS. Thank you, my dear. . . . (*Curiously.*) It's like the sound of the "Joan Danvers's" screw thrashing through the water. . . .

(*Slight pause.*)

JOAN (*rises—quietly—tensely*). It's a horse's hoofs on the drive. . . . (*Her voice rising—a lump in her throat—a thrill in her tone.*) It's some one in a cab— (*Her voice breaking to pieces.*) Oh, Mother—

MRS. DANVERS (*soothingly*). Joan! My dear!

DANVERS (*mechanically*). The tramp of feet on the deck. . . . As she sinks to the water-line. . . . Men running to and fro. . . . They that go down to the sea in ships. . . . They that go down—

(*The door bursts open, and JIMMY stands there.*)

JIMMY. Hallo, everybody! Did you think I was lost? Will some one pay my taxi? I haven't a cent. . . .

(*His cheery greeting is drowned in his mother's cry.*)

MRS. DANVERS. Jimmy! . . . My boy—my son— (*Rushes to him.*)

GLADYS (*with a shriek of joy*). Jimmy! (*Rushes to him.*)

JOAN (*going to C., back of table—holding her heart, scarcely able to breathe*). Jimmy—

JIMMY. Look here, I say! Don't smother a fellow! What's the matter? Didn't you get my wire? I gave it to a porter at Plymouth; he must have collared the shilling, and—

JOAN (*almost choking*). My—husband—

JIMMY. He's all right! He's coming along directly; he had to go and send messages to the wives of the crew. . . .

(JOAN *subsides into chair R., at back of table, buries her face in her arms on the table.*)

Hallo, Father! What's the row? Been seedy?

DANVERS (*mechanically*). They that go down *in* the sea—ships that go down—I haven't got it right—

JIMMY (*to others*). What's the matter? What's he talking about?

MRS. DANVERS. He has been very ill, dear! The shock. . . . We didn't know—whether you hadn't been—

DANVERS (*irritably*). My son—keeps talking to me—and I want to go to sleep—a long, long sleep. He's kept me awake—for weeks—talking to me. . . . Why doesn't he let me go to sleep?

JIMMY (*after a look at the others*). Look here, Father! Don't you know me? It's Jimmy! I've come home. The "Joan Danvers" is at Plymouth—

DANVERS (*slowly*). The "Joan Danvers"—at Plymouth? Nonsense! She's in the Atlantic—fathoms deep. . . . I sent her there—

JIMMY. Buck up, Father! (*Takes his hand.*) Don't you know me?

DANVERS (*looking at him*). My—son!

JIMMY. That's all right, Father. . . . I say, Mother, I'm simply starving! We haven't had anything to eat since one o'clock.

MRS. DANVERS. Jimmy. . . . My dear. . . . I'll get you some supper at once. . . . Come along, Gladys!

(MRS. DANVERS and GLADYS *hurry out, L.*)

JIMMY (*in chair by desk*). By Jove! We nearly *were* at the bottom of the Atlantic; and, if it hadn't been for Ross, we'd be there now. . . . My hat! He's some sailorman, *I* can tell you. . . . We got into a howling sou'-westerly gale after we'd cleared the Scillies; the old ship began to leak like a sieve, and we all had to lend a hand with the pumps. . . . The waves were breaking all over her! Ross handled her like a sportsman; never got fussed, never lost his temper. . . . Then the engines began to kick, and the rotten old shaft went to glory. . . . We thought she was done! We drifted around like a waterlogged derelict for days. . . . The wind had shifted, and it carried us down towards the Bay. . . .

Funny how empty the Atlantic can be when you want help. . . . We worked like niggers getting a jib hoisted—thinking every minute we'd be hitting Cape Finisterre with a wallop! But the wind got round to the sou'-west again. . . . And, by the way, Father! the food was stinking—simply muck. . . . You ought to look into that. . . . No more mouldy bacon and sour lime-juice for yours truly. . . . Well, we got into a fog for three or four days, and scarcely made five knots; then the wind freshened up a bit, and Ross brought us home—a yard at a time. He never left the Bridge. . . . My hat! how we cursed you, Father, for not having a Marconi installation. . . . We got into another fog yesterday; but didn't we let go a yell when it cleared about eight o'clock last night, and there was the jolly old Eddystone flashing right on our port bow. . . . We yelled to a fishing-boat—thought they'd never hear us—and gave 'em a fiver to go back to Plymouth and send us out a tug. . . . We dropped anchor about nine o'clock this morning; we were all just about fagged out. . . . Lloyd's agent took charge, and we scooted home by the first train! (*Rises.*) My Lord, Father! If anyone deserves a medal for great seamanship, it's Edward Ross, my bally brother-in-law. . . .

(*Goes to box on table, takes cigarette, and lights it.*)

DANVERS (*in a whisper*). The "Joan Danvers" safe—
JIMMY. By Jove! that tastes good. (*Sits at desk.*)

(*The front-door closes. JOAN rises, trembling. Ross enters.*)

ROSS. Joan—

JOAN (*throwing herself into his arms*). Ted! My dear! My husband!

ROSS (*to her*). Does your father know?

JOAN. Yes; he's been very ill, dear! We thought— (*Shudders.*) You'd better speak to him. (*She moves R.C., back of table: ROSS goes L. of DANVERS.*)

ROSS (*going to DANVERS*). How do you do, Mr. Danvers? I'm sorry you've been ill.

DANVERS (*slowly*). You've—brought back—the "Joan Danvers"—safely?

ROSS (*grimly*). Yes, sir! And it'll cost you a bit in repairs.

DANVERS (*a grim smile slowly illuminating his countenance*). Are you going to say—I told you so?

ROSS. I'll leave you to remember what I said.

DANVERS. You shall have—another ship—a new one; unless you'd prefer to stay ashore—at the office?

ROSS. I'll see what Joan says. . . . Thank you, sir!

(*Enter Mrs. DANVERS and GLADYS; they leave the door open.*)

MRS. DANVERS. Your supper's ready . . . (*Holding out her hand.*)
My dear Ted—

ROSS (*shaking hands*). Have you forgiven us?

GLADYS. You may kiss me; I'm your sister! I *must* kiss somebody, or I shall shriek!

ROSS. Don't! (*Kisses her.*)

GLADYS. Come along, Jimmy, and have your supper!

JIMMY. You bet I will! (*To Ross.*) You coming, sir?

ROSS (*smiling*). In a minute.

JIMMY. I know what a minute is—to people in love. I'm hungry. . . .

(*Exeunt JIMMY and GLADYS.*)

MRS. DANVERS (*going to DANVERS*). I think you ought to go back to bed, James!

DANVERS. Presently. . . . I want—my daughter—to speak to me—first.

ROSS. What does he mean?

MRS. DANVERS (*piteously*). Joan—

JOAN. Oh, Mother! Don't you understand? It isn't the consequences of a thing, it's the thing *itself* that counts.

DANVERS. You are—hard.

JOAN. I'm not a sentimentalist, Father! I'm not governed by my emotions—only by my reason!

ROSS. Joan—

JOAN (*to DANVERS*). You sent my husband—forced him to risk his life—for your own profit. . . . When I thought I was a widow, I couldn't forgive you! Now that he has come back—thanks to God's mercy and his own courage—I still find it hard to forgive you.

ROSS. You—know?

JOAN. Yes. . . . What do you wish me to do?

ROSS. One can't go on bearing grudges.

JOAN (*smiling*). You're a man; men are sentimentalists—all of them. Women are not; they don't forget—however much they pretend to—or try to . . .

MRS. DANVERS. Joan! For *my* sake—

JOAN. I think Father understands! *He* doesn't forgive easily. . . . I am his daughter—

DANVERS (*with a grim smile*). I realize that.

ROSS. I hate going to sleep—with hard and bitter thoughts of anyone in my mind.


JOAN. Even if they are justly hard and bitter? (*He nods.*) You may be right; I expect you are. . . . My own theories lead me to such terrifying cross-roads sometimes . . . (*with a gulp*). Sometimes one sees *too* clearly. . . . Take Ted into supper, Mother! He's hungry. . . .

(They look at her for a moment, then go out quietly. DANVERS looks hard at JOAN—a little piteously—with a kind of grim irony. She stands for a moment, thinking ; hesitates, then goes L.C., turns to DANVERS, then leans over and kisses his forehead. Then she turns and goes out silently. DANVERS sits staring after her—smiling grimly, gratefully—almost ruefully.)

CURTAIN.





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